

THE RETURN OF THARN by HOWARD BROWNE

VOLUME 22
NUMBER 11

AMAZING STORIES

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By E. J. LISTON



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Cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "Castle Of Terror."

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The

OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

OF COURSE the feature of this issue is the big second installment of Howard Browne's sequel to "Warrior of the Dawn." We know you'll be delighted with the continued adventures of Tharn in "The Return of Tharn." This time the superman of the Cro-Magnon days runs into the worst pickle of his career, and smashes his way through the most thrilling adventures we've ever read—and no foolin'. Just read and see, and then hold your breath for the smashing conclusion of this three-part serial in the December issue. It will make you scream for another sequel—and we hope we get one this time without so many years of waiting!

CHESTER S. GEIER returns to our pages this month with "Cold Ghost" which is one of those eerie little things that leaves you with a chill—and we're not punning. It's not in Chet's usual vein, and perhaps not even in AMAZING's usual vein, but we think you'll like it for a change.

OUR cover this month was painted by Robert Gibson Jones, and was painted without a story on hand—so we had to call in E. J. Liston

to do one for us. We will admit we gave him a tough assignment, but he managed to come off with something different—a story of other dimensions of life where the dead live again, and where all ages come together to produce a very amazing situation indeed. The title is "Castle of Terror" and we think you'll find it so.

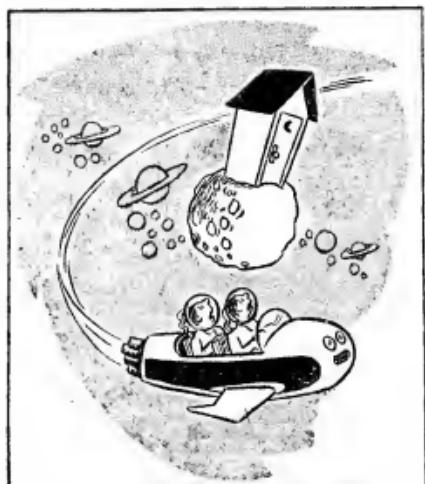
LEE FRANCIS, who can always be depended upon to come up with something different went rather slick on us with "Phantom of the Forest." You will get a surprise with the ending, because it's one of those subtle ones which makes you turn the page to read on, and it takes a few seconds of double-take to realize that he's put a smooth one over on you. But you'll like it!

H. B. HICKEY gives a neat little job with "The Eye of Wilbur Mook." It's a time-travel job which takes us back to the days of Merlin and King Arthur's court. It has a new twist that you'll like.

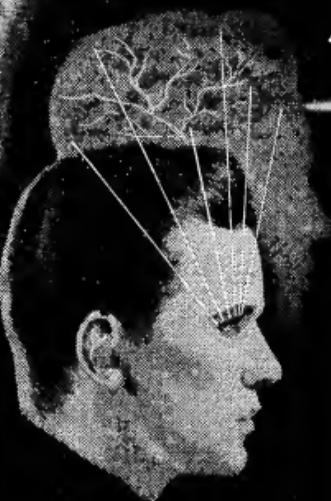
BERKELEY LIVINGSTON, life-long friend of Howard Browne, seems to have read the first installment of "The Return of Tharn" and gotten just a wee bit jealous—because he's turned out a cave-man story of his own, just for competition. We decided to run them together just for contrast and to start an argument between the two as to who's best. Why not write in, you readers, and really start a hot private feud!

KNUT ENFERD, new to our pages, does a story which takes us back to the days of the Druids, in "Day of the Druid." For sparkling action, this story ought to satisfy even the most avid reader.

THEN, to leave the stories, we might mention that there's another big installment of "The Club House" for organized fandom—and by the way, any reader can join fandom if he wishes! That's why we give so much space to the doings of our readers, because we think it's a good thing for them to get together and form local groups to discuss AMAZING STORIES. And with that bit of information, we'll let you go on to the stories in this issue.—*Rap*.



In Your Mind's Eye



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There was a cloud of smoke, a horrid visage, and Mook's legs grew weak beneath him

The EYE of WILBUR MOOK

by H. B. HICKEY

WILBUR!" his mother called. "Better get up or you'll be late for work!"

Slowly but surely Wilbur Mook came out of his beautiful dream. And what a dream it was! He had Peter Bellows down and was busily punching his head. What a dream!

Then his mother's voice pulled him away from Pete Bellows and dragged him back to reality. Wilbur opened one eye and looked at the clock on his bedside table. Its hand said eight o'clock.

Wilbur flung off the covers and slid

his bare feet into lamb's wool bedroom slippers. If he didn't hurry, Wilbur thought, he'd be late to work. At the thought of facing Pete Bellows' angry stare Wilbur shuddered. It was all right to dream, but real life was quite another thing.

Quickly, he ran water into the wash-bowl and washed his hands and face. No time to shower or shave. Running his hand over his chin Wilbur found he didn't need a shave anyway. By skipping that operation he could get to the office early.

He took a moment to survey himself

**When the world's most
cowardly man met the world's
bravest — history was changed**



in the long mirror on the back of the bathroom door. "Every day in every way I am getting better and better," Wilbur muttered. Then he heard his mother's footsteps outside in the hall and he hurried to put on his robe. Just in time he got his head out of the way as the door swung inward.

"You look nice this morning," Mrs. Mook said. "Now hurry before your breakfast gets cold."

He did look pretty good, Wilbur admitted to himself as he looked again into the mirror. At twenty-five his skin was firm and healthy looking, his body straight and neither too thin nor too fat. His reddish-brown hair was free of dandruff, his blue eyes clear.

Only one thing wrong with the picture. He had the soul of a rabbit. He was a coward. There was a tinge of desperation in his voice as he spoke again to his image in the mirror:

"Every day in every way I am getting braver and braver."

Unfortunately it was not true and Wilbur Mook knew it. And the only reason he was not growing more timid, Wilbur reflected miserably, was that such a thing lay outside the realm of possibility.

What was even worse was the fact that everyone else knew it too. It could not have been more evident had Wilbur carried a sign. The only thing he could say was that his mother loved him anyway. Small consolation.

"Read the paper on the streetcar," she said as she helped him into his coat. "And don't run. You know it upsets your stomach when you've just eaten breakfast."

His breakfast had consisted, as always, of orange juice, one poached egg on toast and warm milk. Anything stronger than warm milk, Mrs. Mook had discovered, disturbed Wilbur no end.

AS HE walked to the car Wilbur's mind went back over the dream. That was the stuff! And one of these days he was going to make that dream come true. Pete Bellows was going to find out a thing or two.

"Whyncha look where you're goin'?" a shrill voice demanded.

Wilbur stopped abruptly. In his trance-like state he had stepped on the heel of a twelve-year-old boy bound for school. The boy was glaring at him fiercely and Wilbur cringed.

"I'm dreadfully sorry," he said, knowing that his face was losing color.

"Yah!" the boy snarled. "Look where you're goin' and you won't have to be sorry."

For a moment Wilbur feared the boy was going to hit him. Then a call came from down the street as another school-bound lad hove into sight, and the first one promptly forgot about Wilbur.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Wilbur crossed gingerly to the safety island and waited for his car. When it came he found that all the seats were occupied but he discovered a vacant corner at the front and huddled there.

Unfolding his paper carefully he scanned the world news and found it depressing. It always was, Wilbur thought. He turned to the sport pages for solace. That too was depressing, for it featured the doings of those public heroes who battered each other to a pulp for profit and applause.

Not that Wilbur would have been unwilling to attend a prize fight. No indeed. He would have enjoyed it immensely, except that he could not stand the sight of men beating each other. And the blood! Even the thought of blood made him slightly ill.

He turned quickly to the want ads. Those were always safe, sometimes even exciting. Today there was a man who needed a bodyguard. Wilbur re-

flected wistfully that he would have made a fine bodyguard, if only things were different.

Actually he was a writer of greeting-card poetry, and as he swung off the car his mind was already busy on a poem for Mother's Day. All he needed was a good last line. So far it went:

"To the Mother so loving and tender,
On this day that is yours alone,
Homage I willingly render,
Ta ta-ta tum ta ta."

The last line would come to him, Wilbur knew. It always did. In the meantime he nodded shyly to the elevator starter and found himself a place at the back of the car. It rose swiftly and his heart pounded.

What if it should stop suddenly between floors? There was a beautiful girl standing next to Wilbur and he thought how fear would flood her face. That was the time when a cool and confident voice could avert panic. But Wilbur was aware that there was more chance that the voice would be the girl's rather than his.

His mind went back to the last line of the ditty he had been composing. He almost had it, then it was gone. He bit down on his tongue in concentration, unaware that he was staring at the girl next to him.

"My devotion you'll always own," Wilbur murmured.

"On such short acquaintance?" the girl smiled.

WILBUR turned pink, then red. He wanted to tell her he hadn't meant it that way, and he found himself wishing he had. She was the kind of girl he sometimes dreamed about, tall and not too thin, with golden hair and gray eyes in which flecks of color danced.

"I meant my mother," Wilbur managed at last.

"How sweet. Now would you mind

getting out of my way?"

Wilbur looked down and found that he had somehow managed to walk from the elevator to his office without knowing it. He had his hand on the doorknob.

"I beg your pardon," he mumbled, and flung the door open in what he hoped was a gallant gesture.

There was a crash as the door swung inward for a few feet and stopped. The crash was immediately followed by a howl of pain. A moment later Pete Bellows' flushed and furious face came around the side of the door. He was rubbing his head.

"Mook, you idiot!" Bellows roared. "I ought to punch your nose for this!"

"He didn't know your head was in the way," the girl said.

"Huh?" Bellows grunted. He took a good look at the girl and the anger drained from his face. Without thinking he straightened his tie and slicked back his oily black hair.

"You must be Miss Burnett, the girl the agency said they were sending," Bellows murmured in his most dulcet tones. "Well, well, Wilbur, this is my new secretary."

"But how do you know I'll do?" Miss Burnett said, startled.

"Oh, you'll do. I just know you will," Bellows told her. "You and I are going to get along just dandy."

"My shorthand is a little rusty," the girl said.

"What's a little thing like that?" Bellows laughed, ignoring the fact that he had fired his last secretary because she had misspelled an eight-syllable word.

But the last secretary had worn thick glasses, Wilbur recalled. That would make a difference to Pete Bellows. He was suddenly aware that Bellows was frowning at him.

"Get to work, Mook," Bellows said

cheerfully. "Mother's Day is coming, you know."

With what he pretended was a gentle pat on the back Bellows flung Wilbur toward the tiny cubicle he occupied at the rear of the large office. Once Bellows had played tackle on a football team and although he was beefier now he was still very strong. Wilbur almost went through the thin partition.

He bounced off and recovered his balance, then went into his cubicle through the door. It was a windowless hole, lit by a single small bulb. Wilbur worked at an old table which was neatly stacked with sheets of blank paper. He furnished his own pen.

There was a small window in Wilbur's door, but contrary to what a visitor might have expected, it had not been placed there for Wilbur's convenience. The window was the means by which Bellows could watch his poet and be certain that he was working every minute of the time.

TODAY Wilbur found himself at a loss for rhymes. By mid-morning he had completed only fifteen poems in praise of Mother. He still had some fifty to go. But instead of writing he too often caught himself listening to what was going on in the outer office.

"Mr. Bellows—" the new girl started to say.

"Call me Pete," Wilbur heard Bellows tell her. "I'll call you Jean. Just one happy family, you know, you and I and Wilbur."

"Does Mr. Mook write all the poetry?" Miss Burnett wanted to know. She sounded quite impressed and Wilbur glowed with a new found pride.

"Just a knack. Doesn't take any brains," Bellows deprecated. "Any fool could do it."

I'd like to see you try, Wilbur

thought. You're one fool who couldn't. He thought that was pretty good repartee, even if it was only mental. Wilbur wished he had the nerve to say the words to Bellows' face. But he didn't.

His newspaper, still folded to the classified ads, reposed in Wilbur's wastebasket and his eyes chanced to fall upon it. Something stirred in Wilbur. There had been one advertisement in particular. Just below the request for a bodyguard. He wondered if he had read it right.

Keeping one eye on the window to make sure Bellows did not observe him, Wilbur retrieved his newspaper. Quickly his eye sped down the column. There it was:

Are you timid? Do you lack confidence? I can help you. A. J. Merlin, 136 W. Erie St.

Wilbur shook his head and dropped the newspaper into the wastebasket. He was rather inclined to think A. J. Merlin was overestimating his powers. Probably a fake, anyway. Most of those fellows were.

Looking out of his window, Wilbur saw Bellows patting Jean on the shoulder as he explained something to her. He was a fast worker, was Pete Bellows. By the time Wilbur got the next line of poetry written Bellows was asking Jean if he could take her to lunch.

Before answering she turned her head toward Wilbur and he could see that she was none too happy about the offer. She seemed to be trying to think of a good reason for not accepting.

"Well?" Pete asked. Jean looked back at him.

"I—I guess so," Wilbur heard her say. Bellows patted her on the shoulder again.

I wonder, Wilbur thought, what she would say if I asked her sometime? That looked like a question which would never find an answer. It would

take more nerve than he had to ask. But the very thought of him inviting a girl like Jean to lunch sent a pleasant tingle down Wilbur's back. He even allowed himself to think that she might prefer a smoother type of man than Pete Bellows. Smoother, Wilbur reminded himself miserably, not mushier.

Just before noon Pete Bellows came in to get the copy Wilbur had turned out through the morning. At the sight of the tiny stack which had accumulated Bellows' mouth turned down.

"Loafing!" he accused. "Just because I've been too busy to keep my eyes on you!"

It occurred to Wilbur that the only thing he'd seen Pete do that morning was pat Jean's shoulder, and that hardly seemed like hard work. But he didn't say anything.

"Probably reading the paper while my back was turned," Pete went on. He reached down and got the paper and put it in his pocket. "Now, listen to me, Mook. You'd better have some work done when Jean and I get back from lunch!"

Wilbur nodded without looking up at him. He was always afraid to look at Bellows when the burly man was angry. Pete could get a vicious glint in his eye. After Pete had left the cubicle Wilbur sneaked a look after him. He saw that Jean had heard the whole thing. And at sight of the distaste on her face he flushed.

Why couldn't he have told Pete off? Wilbur started to dream about what he should have said. Then he stopped. It was all right to daydream but Pete had sounded sore when he had said he wanted to see some work done. Wilbur put his head down and started writing.

Within the hour he had completed six odes to Mother. One of them, Wilbur knew, he could sell to a magazine for twenty times what Bellows would pay.

For a moment he was tempted, even going so far as to pick up the sheet of paper preparatory to putting it in his pocket. Then he thought of what Pete Bellows might do if he found out. Wilbur set the paper back on the pile.

He was just in time. There were footsteps out in the hall and then the door swung open. Bellows and Jean came in. The girl was laughing now, and as Pete helped her off with her coat he was practically breathing down her neck. It looked as though he had made some progress.

"Is it all right if I go to lunch now?" Wilbur asked timidly. He had to wait until Pete had checked over his work. Then he got permission to go.

UNTIL he was outside Wilbur felt hungry. For an hour his stomach had been reminding him that it was time to eat. But suddenly the pangs of hunger were gone. The thought of food was even unpleasant.

Maybe a short walk would give him fresh appetite, Wilbur thought. The day was pleasant and sunny. If he spent a half hour walking he would still have twenty minutes in which to gulp a sandwich. Pete Bellows had decreed that fifty minutes constituted a lunch hour for Wilbur.

It was with no conscious motive that Wilbur headed south. He found himself walking at a gait much faster than his usual one, but attributed that to the fine weather which he assured himself was exhilarating. Before he realized how fast he was going he had covered a dozen blocks.

The neighborhood had changed. Behind him lay the business district with its skyscrapers. All about him were the sagging and unsightly houses of a once fine residential neighborhood which had deteriorated into a slum area. The only places which seemed at all cared for

were the rooming houses.

A poem of protest rose in Wilbur's breast, and was stilled as he became aware that he was on Erie street. The street had some meaning for him but it took several minutes before he realized why. Then he gasped. Only two doors from where he stood was 136 West Erie Street!

For a long time Wilbur stood looking at the house. It was an old red brick structure three stories high. The upper two floors appeared untenanted. If they were not, the occupants must have liked fresh air for there were no windows.

Wilbur directed his attention to the first floor. The windows there were too dusty to see through, but at least there were windows. A fat grey cat sunned itself on the widow ledge and regarded Wilbur with unblinking eyes. He shuddered and had to summon all his courage to climb the stairs and look at the card nailed to the front door. A. J. Merlin, the card said, in an unusual script that Wilbur had trouble deciphering.

He raised his hand to knock, then changed his mind. But as he was turning away he heard the door open.

"Looking for me, bub?" a creaking voice said. Wilbur turned around.

He found himself face to face with an old gentleman wrapped in what appeared to be a blue dressing gown with white stars all over it. The old man had a wisp of a beard and white eyebrows that slanted way up at the outside corners. He was wearing on his head a blue dunce cap which also had white stars on it.

"Are you-uh-Mr. A. J. Merlin?" Wilbur stammered. "I mean the Mr. Merlin who gives people confidence?"

"I might be," the old man said cagily.

He stared down at Wilbur, and for the first time Wilbur noticed the old man had eyes as black and mysterious

as a pool on a dark night. Those eyes regarded Wilbur, noting his size, weight and general construction.

"Bah," the old man snorted. "You won't do. Not timid enough."

"Yes, sir," Wilbur chattered. He started backward down the stairs and almost fell.

"Wait a minute," the creaky voice ordered.

Wilbur halted in mid-step. The black eyes regarded him. A hand tipped by long, curving fingernails stroked the wisp of a beard.

"On the other hand," the old man said, "you might be more timid than you look. Come on in."

WILBUR trailed after him down a long dark hallway that was musty with age. At the end of the hall was an equally musty room, sparsely furnished with sagging and broken odds and ends. It was not the furniture which engaged Wilbur's attention, but the other features of the place.

On an ancient stand a sun-dial reposed, and next to it a large and milk-white glass ball. Near the stand a tripod stood over a sheet of metal on which a small fire blazed, and from the tripod a kettle was suspended. Something bubbled in the kettle, something that gave off a strange and noxious odor.

Around the room jugs were scattered, and as Wilbur caught sight of the labels a chill ran up his back. There were such unusual items as *Essence of Dried Toad*, *Basilisk Oil*, *Chimera's Breath-Distilled*.

"Sit down," A. J. Merlin said suddenly. Wilbur sat down with such abruptness that he almost went through an ancient sofa to the floor. Merlin's eyes lit up.

"You really are timid," he said.

"Yes, sir," Wilbur agreed hastily.

"Do you think you can help me?"

"Depends. It isn't my regular line. I came here looking for a special kind of person. If you're that person you can help me. In return I'll do the same for you. All depends on how cowardly you are."

"I've never been brave about anything in my life," Wilbur said truthfully.

He went on in detail. In a short history of his life he made it clear that he was a complete and abject coward. He was afraid of anything that walked or swam or flew, no matter how small. He was afraid of dark rooms. A dirty look made him tremble.

"Perfect," Merlin breathed. He rubbed his taloned hands together. "Not a shred of courage in you."

"Is that good?" Wilbur gasped.

Merlin smiled, and with his smile his eyebrows slanted more than ever. His ears were suddenly elongated.

"Ordinarily not," he said. Wilbur had a hunch that this time there would be nothing extraordinary to alter the case.

"I've tried everything," he told Merlin. "I've gone to psychologists, read books, even tried Yoga. Nothing helps."

"Naturally," Merlin said. "I'll tell you why: Everyone is a mixture of traits handed down from his ancestors. Somewhere in every man's ancestry is a brave person. Even if that bravery is hidden, it's still there, and it can be brought out."

"What happened to me?" Wilbur wanted to know.

"You got cheated," Merlin said as though he were immensely pleased. "You got only half the traits, and they were the cowardly ones. That's why you couldn't be cured. There was no bravery in you to be brought out."

"Oh," Wilbur gulped. "I guess I'd better be going." He started to rise.

"Sit down," Merlin said. Wilbur plunked back into the sofa. He watched Merlin walk to the stand and lift the glass ball. The old man peered into the ball and its color changed to rose, then purple. Something was going on inside it but Wilbur couldn't see what.

"Who's this fellow Pete Bellows?" Merlin wanted to know.

Wilbur was astonished. He hadn't mentioned Pete's name. When he told the old man who Pete was Merlin chuckled.

"Thinks he's quite a man with the ladies, doesn't he? I'll fix him."

Merlin made a pass over the glass ball and muttered a few words which Wilbur didn't catch. There was a sudden thump, clearly audible to Wilbur, and Merlin chuckled gleefully.

"What happened?" Wilbur asked.

"The door opened just as he was going by and he walked into the edge of it. He's got a black eye."

"Good-bye," Wilbur said. The hair on the back of his neck was standing on end as he moved toward the door of the room.

"Come back here," Merlin commanded. "You want me to make you brave, don't you?"

Wilbur's mind whirled. He had fallen into the hands of this old madman and now he didn't know how to get away. Who knew what might happen to him? He had to think of something.

"What do you charge?" he asked. No matter what Merlin said Wilbur was prepared to say he didn't have that much. In no way was he prepared for Merlin's words.

"Your right eye."

A COLD sweat formed on Wilbur Mook's brow. His teeth chattered. Down at his little toe a tremor started and worked its way up along his spine. The roof of his mouth turned dry as

dust and his throat was parched.

"I haven't got it," he choked. Because he had been ready to say that he had said it automatically. Too late he realized it was the wrong answer.

"Don't be a fool," Merlin told him sternly. "Wouldn't you rather be a one-eyed hero than a two-eyed coward?"

"No," Wilbur said.

Merlin glared at him balefully and Wilbur quailed and cringed. What sort of nightmare had he wandered into? He would gladly have given everything he owned to be back in the office. Even Pete Bellows was better than this maniac!

"Could I please go, Mr. Merlin?" Wilbur begged. "I'll be late if I don't. Pete will be sore."

"Tell you what I'll do," Merlin said, in a manner of one offering an added incentive. "You let me have your right eye and I'll see to it that Bellows falls down the stairs and breaks his neck."

He picked up the glass ball again and Wilbur felt himself grow faint. Now he was certain that this old man was not only a maniac but a *homicidal* maniac!

"Wouldn't anything but my right eye do?" he asked plaintively.

"I don't think so, but I'll look it up," Merlin said. Out of the folds of his white-starred gown he drew a book. Wetting his index finger, Merlin turned pages until he came to the one he wanted.

"*Elixir of Caution*," Merlin read aloud. "One part *Fawn's Breath*, one part *Dove's Heart-Dried*, one part *Tears of Despair*, and *Right Eye of Complete Coward*. Simmer for one hour with proper incantations."

"But I'm cautious enough already!" Wilbur protested. He got to his feet hopefully. "Well, I guess this has been a mistake. I'd better be running along."

Merlin regarded him with a steady

eye and Wilbur wished he could divine what was going on behind those black and glittering orbs. Maybe Merlin was going to let him go. From the way Merlin was nodding his head it seemed that way.

"Very well," the old man said. "But we must have a drink together."

"Oh, I never drink," Wilbur assured him virtuously. Merlin waved aside the protest.

"Nothing stronger than tea," he said.

He went to a far corner of the room and lifted a small vial which was made of some material that shimmered iridescently. Wilbur watched fascinated as Merlin poured a small amount of a smoky liquid from the vial into a pair of tiny cups.

"Are you sure this isn't strong?" Wilbur asked as Merlin handed him one of the cups. Inside the cup the strange liquid bubbled, and from its surface a fine vapor rose.

"No." That was all. Then Merlin went to the sun-dial on the stand and turned it around several times. When he had adjusted it to his satisfaction he turned back to Wilbur and lifted his cup.

"Here's how," Merlin said.

Wilbur lifted his cup to his lips and drank. Merlin was right. The liquid seemed no stronger than tea. In fact it tasted much like tea, except that it had a smoky flavor, not at all unpleasant.

"Thank you," he said politely, and started for the door. But he had no more than started than he turned back and sat down again.

It was a strange feeling which assailed Wilbur Mook. His legs seemed weak, yet through the rest of him a strength flowed which was like liquid fire. Then there came a giddiness. His head was feather light.

Merlin receded, not walking but floating back and back. And as his

figure drifted away from Wilbur it grew strangely taller. The eyebrows were more slanted than ever and the ears were longer and more pointed. And as Merlin's figure grew larger it began to dissolve.

Now Wilbur's entire body seemed as light as air to him. It felt as though he too could float if he tried. He saw, as through a haze and at a great distance, Merlin bending over the kettle which hung from the tripod.

From inside his flowing gown Merlin produced a wand and a packet. Out of the packet drifted a fine white powder into the kettle. There was a wave of the wand, and out of the kettle poured a thick black smoke which filled the room until there was nothing but blackness.

Wilbur's ears were filled with a roaring. He felt himself lifted and whirled. Around and around he whirled, and faster and faster. He was being sucked into a vortex, pulled down into a black tunnel that was endless.

SOMEWHERE nearby there was a crowd of people. Wilbur knew that because he could hear the murmur of many voices. But when he opened his eyes he found himself in a forest glade. The sun was bright overhead and on a limb above him a bird sang.

He shook himself and looked around. He was not alone. Only a few feet away stood Merlin, still wearing his blue robe and his conical hat. He nodded when he saw that Wilbur was awake.

"How do you feel?" the old man asked.

"Fine, thank you," Wilbur answered without thinking.

It was when he looked down at his body that he sucked in his breath. Not only was he no longer in that musty room, but he no longer wore his own

clothes! His body was encased in a gown of brown monk's cloth!

"Your clothes would have been out of place here," Merlin told him, guessing what Wilbur thought.

"But—where am I?"

"Near Camelot," Merlin said. "Better get up now. We haven't much time."

Wilbur got to his feet slowly, his eyes darting about. If he saw a chance he would make a run for it. But Merlin's hand was like a claw on the sleeve of Wilbur's robe.

"You try to run and I'll put a curse on you that will fix you permanently," the old man whispered hoarsely.

Wilbur followed him like a lamb to the slaughter. They took a path that led out of the glade and to a road only a few yards away. Ten yards or so down the road they came on the crowd whose voices Wilbur had heard. His hair stood on end.

They were before the doors of an ancient church. And in the cleared space before those doors milled a strange throng. Men on foot wore robes of the plain monk's cloth and carried wooden staves. Towering above them were mounted men, men dressed in hauberks and doublets of chain mail. All of them had their eyes fixed on something in the center of the crowd.

Then someone caught sight of Merlin and his name was whispered. As by magic the people parted to let him and Wilbur through. For the first time Wilbur saw what they had been staring at. It was a rough block of stone, and buried to the hilt in the stone was a sword!

"Merlin," a voice said, a voice that was heavy and assured.

Wilbur looked up and shrank away from the armored giant on horseback who towered over him and the old man. The giant raised the visor of his helmet and Wilbur beheld a face that was as

cruel as a hawk's. Dark eyes gleamed from beneath black and bristling brows.

"What mummery is this?" the dark man asked.

"No mummery, but the good bishop's prayer answered," Merlin said calmly. "Is not the stone inscribed, Sir Kay?"

"Inscribed," Sir Kay echoed. "And its message is that he who withdraws the sword shall be king of England."

His scowl made Wilbur's knees weak-en, but Merlin remained unaffected. In fact the old man seemed quite cheerful.

"Excalibur is it called," Merlin said. "He who wrenches it free shall rule."

"Hear me," Sir Kay grated. "If this be one of your tricks, know this: none but a son of Uther Pendragon will reign."

For a moment Wilbur forgot the two. He had caught sight of the inscription of the stone and was reading it. Apparently it was meant to be a poem but it did not rhyme. On the spot Wilbur produced what he thought was a better one. He tried it out, not realizing he spoke aloud.

"Who from this stone Excalibur draws
Shall be England's king and make
her laws."

Sir Kay frowned blackly and his hand hovered near a dagger at his side.

"What have you to do with this, var-let?" he demanded.

"He is but a troubadour," Merlin interjected quickly. "A bard who will sing your praises after the tourney."

"I had forgotten the tourney," Sir Kay grunted. "But see you forget not my warning."

He reined away, knocking people aside like tenpins. Behind him the other knights followed, and after them went the common people. In a few minutes Wilbur and Merlin found themselves alone. In the distance, and in the di-rection the crowd had vanished, Wilbur saw the towers of a medieval castle.

"Camelot," Merlin told him.

"I don't like this," Wilbur said. "That fellow looked as though he wanted to slit my throat."

"Yours wouldn't be the first one he's slit," Merlin said. "But you stay close to me and you'll be safe enough. Although I must admit that Kay has be-come quite a problem since his father died."

"Is he a son of Uther Pendragon?"

"Why do you think he insists that none but Uther's sons may rule?" Merlin snarled. "But with a king like him we'd have nothing but corpses around. That's why I needed you."

WILBUR was bewildered, but not completely baffled. It had be-come painfully clear to him that Merlin had found him, not vice versa. The advertisement in the paper had been a trick to lure a timid man. But there was still a little clearing up to be done.

"Would you please explain what I have to do with all this?" Wilbur asked plaintively. Merlin clawed gently at his beard and shrugged.

"I suppose it would be only fair, after abducting you from the twentieth century and dragging you back here. The point is this: after Uther died there was a squabble over who should be king. We couldn't stand a civil war so the bishop of this church prayed for a sign, and the next day this stone and sword were found here. So far nobody has been able to pull it out."

"You didn't have anything to do with that, did you?" Wilbur asked naively.

"I'm not saying. Anyway, Sir Kay is the logical man for the job, except that he's too quick with his blade. That left only one other, and he's got his fault too."

Wilbur was thinking about his right eye. A little flattery might go a long way.

"I should think you would make a good king, Mr. Merlin."

"My father was an incubus," Merlin said, as though that explained everything. He peered down the road as the sound of hoofs reached them.

Wilbur followed Merlin's gaze and saw a young man on horseback coming toward them from the direction of Camelot. The young fellow wore a shirt of mail but no helmet, and his horse was not armored. Merlin held up his hand and the mounted man drew rein. Wilbur got a good look at him.

He was almost as big as Sir Kay, but with a fair complexion and light hair. He could not have been much over fifteen, despite his size. His manner was easy, giving the suggestion of enormous strength in reserve, yet with a hint of gentleness. But it was his eyes which were his outstanding feature. They were a clear brown, wide, and with an expression of complete fearlessness.

"Where to, Arthur?" Merlin asked.

"My brother Kay has broken his sword. I must get him another."

"Tarry a moment," Merlin said. "I have a question which troubles me. The enemies of our land march against us, and they outnumber us five to one. Were you king, what would you do?"

Arthur laughed, a clear ringing laugh that showed rows of white teeth. His brown eyes glowed with an inward fire.

"Do? I would take the field against them, of course! Even though they outnumber us fifty to one."

Wilbur thrilled to the words. But Merlin shuddered slightly and Wilbur heard a faint groan of distress come from his lips.

"Got here in the nick of time," the old man muttered. He looked up at Arthur and said aloud: "You may have your chance. But first you must make me a promise. You must come to my

castle this very night and drink the draught I shall prepare for you."

"I promise," Arthur said unthinkingly. "And now I'll be getting that sword for Kay."

"This looks like a good one," Merlin said. He pointed to the sword in the stone.

"It does indeed," Arthur agreed. Without a second look he bent and seized the hilt and wrenched it free. He raised the sword in a salute to Merlin and Wilbur, laughed his ringing carefree laugh, and was gone in a cloud of dust.

MERLIN'S castle was not overly large, and as far as Wilbur could see after he got inside, most of it was under ground. He and the old man were in a great damp chamber, the walls of which were solid rock. The room was filled with Merlin's jugs, with tripods from which boiling kettles hung, and with great black cats which prowled everywhere. The door was of solid oak and immovable. Wilbur knew; he had tried it once when Merlin had gone out.

At the moment Merlin and he were sitting facing each other on a pair of stone couches. They had been sitting so for some hours and the silence was wearing Wilbur down.

"So Arthur is going to be king," he said at last, in an effort to start a conversation. "He looks like a fine boy."

"He is," Merlin agreed. "Chivalrous and all that. It was foreordained. That's why I had to get back. I knew he was going to be along that road today, and I knew he was going to pull out that sword."

"I thought you said he had a fault."

"What a fault," Merlin sighed. "He's got your trouble, but in reverse. He was born without fear. It's a bad thing

for a king to be like that. He'd lead his people into sure death. You heard what he said this afternoon. Even odds of fifty to one mean nothing to him."

For the first time Wilbur saw the whole thing. Until now he had entertained a faint hope that Merlin might not really want his eye. But this was the clincher. The *Elixir of Caution!* Desperately he cast about for a means of escape. There was none. And Merlin was watching him with an eagle eye.

"Maybe," Wilbur offered weakly, "a few drops of my blood would do the trick. You don't want Arthur to get *too* timid."

"Nice of you to think of it," Merlin said. "But I really couldn't fool with that recipe."

Wilbur wished with all his heart that he had the courage to put up some kind of fight. Merlin was an old and feeble man. But he knew his genetics. Wilbur had been born without a gene of courage. Wilbur rubbed his right eye, the one he would soon be without, and felt tears well up. His last glimmer of hope was borne on a sigh.

"Maybe he won't come."

"He'll come all right. Arthur never breaks a promise. That's one of his best points. What I'm trying to do is see to it that he isn't so rash about making them in the first place."

It seemed that Merlin was right, for just then there came to their ears the sound of iron shod hoofs in the courtyard above their heads. The ceiling trembled slightly and a drop of water fell on Wilbur's head. Then footsteps clattered down a long flight of stairs and the door swung open. It was Arthur, and from his appearance it was plain he had been in a fight.

FROM a cut alongside his temple blood dripped. His shirt of mail

had been pierced at the left shoulder and blood glistened redly there. Some had trickled down and lay in beads like rubies on the gleaming mail. His face was streaked with sweat and dirt and his hair lay in wet clumps, and he was breathing hard.

"What happened?" Merlin asked quickly. Arthur let out a laugh and his eyes glowed fierce.

"A band of varlets tried to ambush me on my way here. Had I not been in so great a hurry to keep my appointment with you I'd have brought you some heads on Excalibur's point."

He held up the great sword and Wilbur turned faint at the sight of the gore along its blade. He put his hand over his mouth and his eyes rolled upward.

"Wipe that blade before this one perishes of fright," Merlin said quickly. Then he became solicitous. "Are you sore wounded?"

"There were only ten," Arthur laughed. "They were too busy defending their lives to do me much harm. Now, where is that drink you invited me here for?"

"It will take a while to prepare," Merlin said. He busied himself with a kettle and some jugs and powders.

Wilbur was turning a pale green from fright. He had to think of something. Suddenly he turned to Arthur.

"You won't like this drink," he whispered urgently. "It may even poison you!"

Arthur stared down at him. "Even so I needs must drink it. I have given my word. A promise may not be broken."

Merlin was coming toward them now and Wilbur saw that the old man held in his hand an instrument which looked like a surgeon's scalpel. He let out a shriek of terror and would have run had his legs not been paralyzed.

"What is this womanly fright?"

Arthur asked, wrinkling his nose.

"I need his right eye to make the *Elixir of Caution*," Merlin explained. He laid a claw on Wilbur's shoulder and it was like the hand of doom.

"Yeeow!" Wilbur howled. He began to babble. "You lied to me! You said you'd make me brave! False pretenses!"

He stopped abruptly. Merlin's hand had fallen from his shoulder. There was a sudden silence that grew thick and ominous. Looking up fearfully, Wilbur saw that Arthur had fixed Merlin with a hostile glare.

"Did you so promise?" Arthur demanded. He stood straight and regal. "Answer me, and forget not I am your king."

Merlin's hands made feeble and apologetic gestures.

"What could I do?" he pleaded. "One like him is born seldom. I had searched the centuries, and there was no more time."

He turned to Wilbur and his face betrayed an apprehension that made Wilbur's hopes rise. Arthur did not act like he would stand for any promise-breaking among his subjects.

"Tell you what I could do," Merlin said. "I could put your eye back when I'm through with it. In fact, that's a promise."

"Will that make him brave?" Arthur demanded.

"Well . . ." Merlin hesitated. Arthur's finger slid suggestively along the blade of his sword.

"I'll look it up," the old man finished hurriedly.

HIS hand dipped beneath his robe and came out with the ancient book. A long nailed finger ran through the pages. There was a pause, and then Merlin began to mumble.

"*Elixir of Fortitude*: One part

Eagle's Heart-Dried, one part *Lion's Breath-Distilled*, one part *Essence of Steel*, hm-m-m." His voice trailed off in a hum, then picked up again. "Simmer for one hour. *Caution*: MUST BE FINISHED BEFORE MIDNIGHT."

"Well?" Arthur said.

"I've got everything except the last ingredient," Merlin said unhappily. Suddenly his face lit up. "We'd better hurry. There is only an hour and a half left."

He scurried to a bottle which hung on the wall and brought it back to Wilbur. "Drink some quickly. You will feel no pain." When Wilbur had gulped some down Merlin took the bottle and handed it to Arthur. "You too."

ABOVE their heads there was a rumbling and the pounding of hoofs in the courtyard. Quickly Merlin ran to the oak door and slammed it shut. He seemed to be expecting trouble. It turned out he was right again.

More than one pair of feet was on the stone stairway. Loud voices shouted, "Open up!" Wilbur recognized one of the voices and he groaned. Then bodies were hurled against the door.

It held against the first assault, and against the second. The third time there was a splintering of wood. Wilbur held his breath. A hinge had torn loose. Once more there was the crash of armored bodies against the oak and the door flew inward. Sir Kay was inside in a flash, and behind him came five more. The dark man's eyes lit on Wilbur.

"So, varlet!" Kay bellowed hoarsely. "My suspicion was right. You are in the plot against me!"

Without waiting for a denial he flung himself at Wilbur and his sword swished through the air. How he man-

aged it Wilbur never knew, but he ducked in time. The flat of Kay's sword caught him a glancing blow on the head and knocked him off the stone bench.

Then the great room was filled with the clash of steel as Arthur went into action. Out of eyes that were glassy Wilbur saw him decapitate two men with a single stroke. Another fell dead before he could raise his shield. The other two fled with Kay's curses following them. Only Arthur's brother was left.

"Yield," Arthur warned grimly. Kay's reply turned Wilbur's ears red. The two went at it. For a few minutes it was an even battle, and then suddenly both swords came together with a force that drew sparks. Kay was left with only a hilt in his hand.

What happened next Wilbur hardly knew. There was a clang as something bounced on the stone floor, and a great round object that looked like a helmet rolled past him.

"Quickly now," Wilbur heard Merlin say. "There is barely the hour left to us."

Wilbur could hear but he could see nothing. There was a black veil over his eyes. Powerful arms lifted him and laid him on the stone bench. Then there was the sound of bottles being emptied into kettles. Wilbur heard feet approach him but he was too sleepy to care. Something touched his eye but he felt no pain.

In his dazed state time passed quickly for him. There was always the scuffling of Merlin's feet, and now and again the old man's creaky voice rose in weird incantations. Then something hot was pressed against Wilbur's lips.

"Drink," Merlin said. Wilbur opened his mouth and felt a hot liquid gush down his throat.

"I want my eye," Wilbur mumbled.

"Don't worry," Merlin told him. "I'm getting it."

He was taking his time about it, Wilbur thought. He could hear a great stirring going on. There were muffled curses and he heard something bouncing on the floor.

"Darn stuff is so thick I can't tell them apart," Merlin was muttering.

"Hurry!" Arthur called. "The cock crows midnight!"

"I'm doing my best," Merlin said. He was breathing hard as he bent over Wilbur. There was a quick pressure against Wilbur's eye socket and Merlin grunted triumphantly.

"There!" the old man said. "I've kept my promise. Now I'm going to send you back where I found you, and good riddance. You've been nothing but trouble."

Again something hot was poured down Wilbur's throat. It had a familiar taste, a sort of smoky flavor. Liquid fire coursed through his veins, he felt his body grow light and buoyant, he was floating. Then he was being sucked down into a black vortex and through a Stygian passage. The passage seemed endless but it was not, and at the end was a tiny hole of light which grew steadily larger.

WILBUR found himself on a sagging porch, before a door that leaned on sprung hinges. His head ached, and raising his hand he ran it along his scalp until he found a large bump. He rolled his eyes upward as though to see where he had been hurt. All he saw was a jagged hole in the porch roof. At his feet was a chunk of plaster.

It took a minute for the realization to filter through that he was standing on the porch of 136 W. Erie Street. Wilbur recalled walking up the stairs. After that everything was a blur. He

scrutinized the door. There was no card bearing the name of A. J. Merlin. In face, there was no card at all!

"Hey, mister," a boy's voice called. Wilbur turned around and saw a tattered urchin regarding him gravely. "Ain't nobody lived in that house for years," the boy said. "It's haunted."

Wilbur shuddered and at the same instant became aware of a peculiar phenomenon. He seemed to be seeing the boy through only one eye. The other was strangely blurred. Wilbur pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his right eye. His vision improved but as he moved toward the head of the stairs he swayed slightly.

"You get hurt or something?" the boy asked as Wilbur came toward him. Wilbur rubbed his head.

"I'm all right," Wilbur told him. He said it partly to reassure himself.

He looked at his wrist watch and found he had only twenty minutes to get back to work. That was puzzling. There was a lapse of time. Being a man of imagination, Wilbur reflected that if he had actually been in the past he would not have used up any time in the present.

On the other hand, it was more probable that he had been hit on the head by falling plaster and had incurred a slight lapse of consciousness, memory, or both. He was inclined to accept that explanation.

At any rate he was going to be late if he didn't hurry, and Pete Bellows would be mad as a hornet. Wilbur speeded up his pace. Then he slowed down again. If anyone should be angry it was himself. He had missed his lunch.

Riding up in the elevator Wilbur checked his watch again and found he was only five minutes late. In his working life that represented two lines of doggerel. It didn't seem like much

to get excited about. But Pete Bellows didn't see it that way.

"Mook!" he roared, as Wilbur came through the door. "You're late!"

If he had expected Wilbur to fall into his usual fit of trembling he was disappointed. Wilbur was staring at him.

"Your eye!" Wilbur gasped. Pete's left eye was swollen half shut and had a blue ring around it.

"He walked into the door," Miss Burnett said. "Honest."

Wilbur smiled at her. She was a very pretty girl. Too pretty to be working for a wolf like Pete Bellows. Wilbur had a notion to tell her so.

"I said you're late, Mook," Pete told him ominously.

"So what?" Wilbur asked quietly. "If you don't like it you can fire me. In fact, considering that you find so much fault with my work I'm surprised you haven't discharged me long ago. But I'll save you the trouble. I quit."

Pete was staring at him as though Wilbur had gone mad. Maybe he had, Wilbur thought. Maybe Pete was going to get sore and punch him in the nose. It didn't seem to matter.

"Not only that," Wilbur added. "I'm going into business for myself. How would you like to work for me, Miss Burnett?"

"I think I'd like that just fine," she said. She took her purse out of a drawer in her desk and got her coat and put it on.

Pete Bellows was a stricken man. For once he had nothing to say. His mouth dropped open and he leaned against his desk. "W-wait a minute, Wilbur, old pal," he managed to gasp finally.

"Goodbye," was all Wilbur had to say. He held the door open carefully for Miss Burnett, then shut it behind them as carefully.

Wilbur knew that he was outwardly calm. Inside, he was filled with amazement at himself. Never had he thought to see the day when he would stand up to Pete Bellows. Now he had not only done it, he had got away with it! He took Miss Burnett's elbow. She was looking at him rather queerly, he thought.

"What's the matter?"

"I just noticed the strangest thing about you," she said. "You're the first person I've ever seen who had dif-

ferent colored eyes!"

Wilbur gasped. His knees felt weak, and out of the past he heard a creaky voice say, ". . . I can't tell them apart." Now he understood that *Arthur's* right eye had been the last ingredient in the *Elixir of Fortitude!*"

Wilbur smiled. There was nothing to be angry about. He certainly hadn't got the worst of the bargain! His shoulders were squared as he helped Miss Burnett into the elevator car.

"Let's go, Jean," Wilbur said.

AMAZING STORIES CROSSWORD PUZZLE

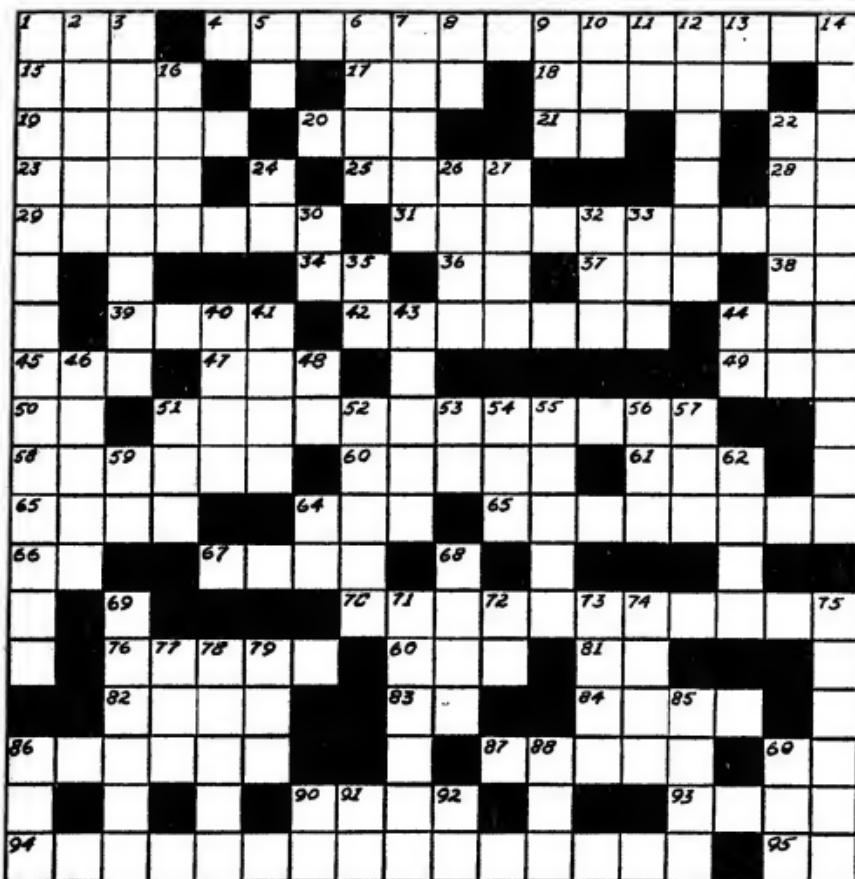
By JAMES R. ADAMS

HORIZONTAL

- Because
- Act of solidifying
- Frank
- Clamor
- Musical instruments
- Submit to another
- Alternate (abbr.)
- Selenium (symbol)
- Upon
- God of love
- One who repeats another's words
- Red Cross (abbr.)
- A rower
- Apparatus for signaling by reflecting the sun's rays
- Accomplish
- Late Latin (abbr.)
- Parent
- Laughter sound
- Bad
- Sends back
- Chum
- Indiana (abbr.)
- Ocean
- Girl's name
- Not
- School for small children
- Bear witness to
- Living
- Meadow
- Bird of the gull family
- Attempt
- Conclusion of a discourse
- Exists
- Expectorate
- Boxer of the heaviest class
- Proficient
- Craft
- Tool for splitting wood
- Character of old Teutonic alphabet
- General Secretary (abbr.)
- Roil (dial.)
- Powerful
- A book
- Pronoun
- Row
- Exacting
- However
- Editor (abbr.)

VERTICAL

- Predestination
- Drama wholly or mostly sung
- Amended
- Bovine quadruped
- Vain
- Moat
- Within
- Pronoun (poss.)
- Hint
- Bachelor of Arts (abbr.)
- Mantle worn by knights
- Exists
- Indifference



16. Suffix
 22. Parentless child
 24. Fourth tone of diatonic scale
 26. Wheel
 27. Jar
 30. North Dakota (abbr.)
 32. Strange
 33. Aeriform, elastic fluid
 35. Either
 40. Ancient god
 41. Season of fasting
 43. Betimes
 44. Sixteenth letter of Greek alphabet
 46. Notices
 48. A public notice
 51. Cognizance
 52. The world
 53. Government Issue (abbr.)
 54. Hail!
 55. Answer
 56. Cloth measure

57. New (prefix)
 59. Trustee (abbr.)
 62. Excited
 64. Titanium (symbol)
 68. Planet
 69. Vegetable
 71. Young eagle
 72. Vermont (abbr.)
 73. Caution
 74. Egress
 75. Blew a horn
 77. A duet
 78. Tedium
 79. Pin
 85. Yearn
 86. Heavenly luminary
 88. Conjunction
 89. Pronoun
 90. Thorium (symbol)
 91. Exists
 92. Rear Admiral (abbr.)

(Answer on Page 154)

COLD GHOST

by Chester S. Geier

IN THE valley, with the sheltering hills now behind them, the bitterly cold wind drove at the sled with unchecked ferocity. Gusts of snow came with the wind, thick and dry, the separate particles of it stinging on

contact.

The dogs made slow progress through the deep drifts. Hager's smoldering irritation blazed into abrupt rage. From his position at the rear of the sled, he lashed out with the driver's



Hager huddled before the fire, trembling with cold that filled him with terror.

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The dogs made slow progress through the deep drifts. Hager's smoldering irritation blazed into abrupt rage. From his position at the rear of the sled, he lashed out with the driver's

All Hager had to do was slow the dogsled to a walk, and his partner died. A perfect crime—no chance to get caught!

whip that he held in one heavily mitten hand, shouting behind the wool scarf covering the lower half of his face. The dogs lunged in their traces, whining. A couple floundered in the powdery footing and were immediately

snapped at by their companions behind them.

The snow was falling swiftly and with a sinister steadiness. It seemed to hang like a vast white curtain over the valley, obscuring the hills and the



Hager huddled before the fire, trembling with cold that filled him with terror

All Hager had to do was slow the dogsled to a walk, and his partner died. A perfect crime—no chance to get caught!

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The snow was falling swiftly and with a sinister steadiness. It seemed to hang like a vast white curtain over the valley, obscuring the hills and the



sangled outline of mountains beyond. The wind seized portions of the curtain and twisted it into fantastic shapes—the shapes of demons, Hager thought suddenly. For the scene through which he moved was a kind of hell, a white and frozen hell, with the howl of the wind like the despairing shrieks of tormented souls.

Hager pictured himself as one of them. And Cahill, huddled in furs on the sled, another. He cursed behind the scarf as he thought of Cahill. This was Cahill's fault, their being out here in the storm. If it weren't for Cahill, he would be back at the cabin, snug and warm, logs blazing cheerfully in the fireplace.

It was a rotten time for Cahill to have taken sick, Hager fumed. But it had happened. And it had left him with nothing else to do but pack their catch of furs, harness up the sled, and start out with Cahill for the doctor in Moose Gulch.

He almost regretted having taken the furs. With Cahill an added burden on the sled, it was too large a load for the dogs to pull with the necessary speed and endurance. But he hadn't dared to leave the entire season's catch unguarded at the cabin. If some wanderer appeared in his and Cahill's absence, the furs would be an irresistible temptation.

Fearing, thus, to leave the furs behind, and now endangered by their weight, Hager found the situation maddening. And the storm was making matters worse. It was near the end of winter, but the climate had chosen this moment to be at its most unco-operative.

Hager muttered blackly against the storm, wondering why he had allowed his trapper's dream of wealth to lure him to this far northern corner of Alaska. It was a cold, bleak and hostile

country. Tiny settlements, like Moose Gulch were few and far between. Of course, furs were at their best and most plentiful here. He and Cahill had proved that, for their catch was a large one. Hager's thoughts soared briefly above his bitter mood as he thought of the money the furs would bring. And of the things that the money would bring back in civilization.

Added to what he had so far managed to save, his share would make almost enough to start a fox breeding ranch. Or a mink ranch. Almost enough—but not quite. That meant he would have to spend another winter in this location, and Hager flinched at the thought. He hated loneliness and the bitter, sub-zero cold. Most of all he hated the cold. Only a fur breeding ranch, with large, warm living quarters, would have made it bearable.

Hager didn't know when the idea came to him. It must have been lying dormant for a long time in a far, dark corner of his mind, only now surging to the fore. Subconsciously he must have prepared himself for this moment of inspiration. He wasn't sure. He was aware only of an interval while he plodded behind the sled, drawn by the struggling and panting team, cursing the dogs, cursing Cahill and the fierce cold that mischievously searched out the most tender portions of his face beneath the hood of his parka. There was that moment, and then—

AND then he found himself toying with the thought of murdering Cahill.

With the other out of the way, the entire proceeds from the sale of furs would be his. There would be no necessity to split. He could start the fur ranch at once. He wouldn't have to spend another winter in this vicious cold. He—

A dozen fascinating new possibilities opened up to Hager. It was as though he had been blind and was able to see only now. Breath-taking vistas blossomed before his awakened eyes. There was music in what he visioned, music and the voices of women, bright lights, color, movement, and the warmth of gentler climes.

The brightest part of the picture was that Cahill's death need not be outright murder. The man was sick. His life depended on getting him into the hands of the doctor in Moose Gulch as quickly as possible.

If Hager were simply to delay in reaching the settlement, Cahill would die as surely as though from the thrust of a knife or the impact of a bullet. Exposure to the biting cold would finish him. And nobody would know. Hager could always claim that he had hurried as best he could under the difficult, hampering circumstances of the storm, but that Cahill had died on the way. As easy as that. If Marshal Art Maddox stuck his long nose into the matter, Cahill's unmarked body would be proof that there had been no foul play.

Hager felt satisfied that his scheme was without loopholes. The idea had become a definite plan. And now his square lips hardened with determination behind the scarf. He looked at Cahill, dozing feverishly on the sled, with deep-set gray eyes that were bleak and implacable.

Cahill would never reach Moose Gulch alive.

With his grim purpose giving new drive to his actions, Hager glanced about him. It was difficult to see through the curtain of snow that hung between him and the landscape, but by squinting steadily through momentary rifts made by the frigid, lashing wind, he was able presently to discern that they were near the pass leading out of

the valley. Beyond the pass, he knew, was a forest, dipping down to the banks of a frozen stream. The stream ran for several miles until it branched into a river, which in turn led directly into Moose Gulch. With these landmarks to guide him, a traveler through the snow-bound wilderness could reach the settlement easily and quickly. But Hager didn't intend to do that. He now had time to kill. He chuckled darkly over the accuracy of the phrase.

Plodding toward the pass, he deliberately slowed his steps. He no longer used the whip or shouted at the dogs for greater speed. The animals were grateful for the respite. They slackened their pace, tongues lolling and bushy tails waving as they bobbed in their plowed path through the white drifts.

Cahill dozed on. Once or twice he moved restlessly amid the furs piled about him. It was as though some deep, vague instinct warned him that something was wrong.

Hager watched the other sharply for a time, then desisted to give his attention to maneuvering the sled through the pass. The forest appeared, the trees wraith-like under their thick, white mantles of snow. Hager didn't follow the dip in the land that led toward the frozen stream. He guided the dogs in the opposite direction and began watching Cahill again. He hoped that the man would not awake until less familiar territory surrounded them.

Cahill didn't awake. He dozed and tossed, his lips moving occasionally in a soundless mutter. His gaunt, leathery face was pale under its growth of grizzled whiskers.

The snow-covered land rose, became rocky and difficult. The dogs began laboring with increasing weariness in their efforts to keep pulling the heavy sled. Hager realized he couldn't go in

this direction much longer. When a ravine suddenly presented itself, relatively free of snow, he decided to call a halt.

UNFASTENING the dogs, he left the ravine and began searching through the snow for brushwood. It took time, but Hager was in no hurry. He gathered an armful and finally returned to the sled.

Cahill was awake. He had propped himself feebly among the furs, his gaunt face blank and drab with sickness. His filmed blue eyes fastened on Hager.

"Water," he whispered. "Water, Matt."

"Coming up," Hager said. "Just you wait a minute, Ben, and you'll get all the water you want."

Cahill fell back among the furs, and Hager leisurely shaved kindling and stacked the wood and then set it ablaze. The ravine was shielded from the wind, and the wood ignited without difficulty. At last Hager went to the sled and removed the small pack he had fortunately thought to bring along. His experience with the wilderness had trained him never to overlook the smallest precautions.

Hager took a handled pan from the pack. He filled it with snow and then held the pan over the flames. When the snow melted, he filled a tin cup with the liquid and went over to Cahill. He had to steady the cup as the other drank.

Finally Cahill nodded. His eyes seemed to clear. He glanced about him, and a dim worry moved in his face.

"Matt, where are we?"

"Somewhere near Boot Valley."

"You...you mean we're lost?"

"I sort of got mixed up in the storm.

Nothing to worry about."

Cahill shivered suddenly. "We got

to reach town, Matt. Got to see the doctor."

Hager nodded. "How do you feel?" "It's getting worse. I can feel it getting worse. I'm cold now, Matt. Before...before I was...." Cahill's voice trailed off. He had to make an effort before he was able to speak again. "Got...got to see the doctor, Matt. Can't waste any time."

"I know," Hager said. "But the team needs a little rest. They've had a lot of heavy hauling, and there's still a distance to go."

Cahill nodded miserably, shivering. He burrowed into the furs, still shivering, breathing rapidly through parted lips. Slowly the chill left him. His eyes clouded again. Then his lids fell, and he dozed once more.

Hager brewed tea and drank it slowly, squatting before the fire. Then he packed and lighted his pipe. He stared into the flames with narrowed eyes, seeing his dreams pictured there. They were pleasant dreams.

Hager remained in the ravine until the supply of wood was gone. Then he fastened the dogs back into their traces and resumed his position behind the sled. With shouts and cracks of the whip, he guided the animals out of the ravine, following the downward slope of the land this time.

The snow stopped falling after a while, but the wind and the cold increased. The cold hung on the air like an enormous, transparent weight. Somehow it seemed to give an impossible crystalline purity to the snow blanketing the trees and the land. In doing so, it emphasized and magnified its very presence. It made itself something almost alive and sentient, icily malignant, overbearing, utterly cruel and without mercy.

Hager cursed the cold with redoubled venom. Despite the thickness of his

fur parka and the layers of clothing beneath the cold seemed to soak into him like an all-penetrating liquid. He had to wave his arms and stamp his feet to fight back a creeping numbness.

BUT the terrible chill could not subdue the flame of purpose burning in Hager's mind. That part of him remained keenly alert. The sled was moving in the direction of the stream, and he was careful to judge the distance carefully. He didn't want to approach too close. At just the right moment he turned the sled at angle back toward the way from which it had come. It was his plan to keep zigzagging, approaching the stream and then retreating, always at a tangent. A great deal of time would be consumed in this way, with very little actual forward progress toward Moose Gulch.

He repeated this maneuver again and again. Cahill roused a few times to inquire weakly about their progress. Always Hager gave the same answer.

"We're getting there, Ben. It won't be long now. Don't you worry."

After that Cahill was silent. It seemed evident to Hager that the man was sinking rapidly. But not as rapidly as Hager wished. He knew he couldn't bear the paralyzing cold much longer, and his hatred of it grew.

The sled reached a group of slab-like rock outcroppings that offered shelter from the slashing wind. Hager stopped the sled behind their protection for a short rest. The additional delay suited his plans.

While the dogs huddled together in the snow, Hager went around the sled to get the pack. He glanced at Cahill's face—and his muscles became tense. Cahill's eyes were open. Cahill was watching him with a terrible steadiness and a soul-searing clarity. Cahill...

knew.

Hager realized that Cahill must have been awake for quite some time, watching the actions of the sled. The man had clearly discovered Hager's deception.

Hager felt transfixed by the accusing brightness in the other's eyes. He sensed that his guilt was written vividly and unmistakably in his face. He fumbled for words that would form an excuse, an apology, some sort of plausible lie—anything that would remove the dreadful knowledge in Cahill's eyes. But no words came.

After a strained, bitter moment Cahill spoke. His voice was low, yet somehow curiously distinct. "You're trying to kill me, Matt. I see it now. You aren't going straight toward Moose Gulch. You're tracking back and forth to waste time. You...want me to die!"

"That isn't true," Hager blurted. "I...I got lost. The storm and cold got me mixed up."

Cahill went on as though he hadn't heard. "It's the furs, isn't it, Matt? You want all the money for yourself. With me out of the way, you won't have any trouble."

"I got mixed up, I tell you," Hager insisted.

Cahill said nothing further. With a burst of energy as sudden as it was amazing, he gripped the sides of the sled and began pushing himself erect. His strangely clear eyes were fixed on Hager.

Mastering a brief surge of panic, Hager threw himself forward, forcing Cahill back into the sled. Cahill struggled a moment, but the reserve strength he had managed to summon quickly gave out. He fell back into the sled and lay limp and quiet, his eyes closed, breathing harshly and rapidly.

Hager watched for several minutes,

the cold creeping slyly into him with the inactivity. Then, assured that Cahill would make no further trouble, he obtained the pack. He fed the dogs this time, tossing them pieces of dried meat. They would need renewed strength and energy to take him the remaining distance to Moose Gulch. Finally, gathering brushwood, Hager built a small fire and brewed tea. He ate a couple of thick sandwiches as he drank the tea, chewing with methodic slowness and glancing at Cahill.

THE other hadn't stirred since making his accusation. But when Hager finished eating, Cahill's eyes opened once more. He looked at Hager for a long, breathless moment. Only a vestige of the unnatural brightness that had been in his eyes remained now. With what must have required a tremendous effort, he spoke.

"You aren't going to get away with this, Matt. I...I'm going to get you. I'm going to make you pay."

A moment longer Cahill looked at Hager. And then the last remnant of brightness left his eyes. His lids fell slowly. He looked exhausted and seemed to be resting. But several minutes later, acting on a sudden realization, Hager felt for Cahill's pulse and found that the man was dead.

Triumph spread through Hager like a heady warmth. It was over. The money from the furs would be his alone. He would have the fur ranch, now. But there was no hurry about that. He would travel a little first and have some fun.

The best part of it was that he would never have to worry. Cahill's body was completely unmarked. It was very obvious that he had died of illness. There couldn't possibly be any suspicions.

Then Hager recalled the threat

Cahill had made before dying. Cahill had promised revenge, but there was nothing he could do now. Hager shrugged the memory away. The dead were dead. They could do no harm.

Hager now lost no time in reaching Moose Gulch. He drove the dogs relentlessly, trotting behind the sled. Elation gave him a strength that took him easily over the miles.

A short time before he entered the settlement it began to snow again. Hager was pleased. The snow would cover up the tracks he had left in the event that Art Maddox did any snooping.

He went directly to the doctor's home, carrying the body of Cahill inside. He cleverly played the part of a man reluctant to believe that his partner had died.

"Isn't there something you can do, Doc?" he asked anxiously. "Maybe it isn't too late."

The other straightened from his examination of Cahill and shook his white thatch. His round, ruddy features were sympathetic. "I'm afraid it's all over. Ben Cahill's as dead as he'll ever be. Most likely he passed away some time before you were able to reach town. Nothing left to do now but turn him over to the undertaker. That's me, in case you don't know. In Moose Gulch it takes two, three jobs to keep a man fairly busy."

Hager sighed and looked properly grief-stricken. "Well, I'll leave you to take care of things, Doc. Do a good job— nothing but the best, you know. Ben was the finest partner a man could ever have."

Hager left and proceeded to visit acquaintances in the settlement, spreading the news of Cahill's death. He was showered with condolences, which he accepted with a suitable air of melancholy. Later, eating supper in the tiny

dining room of Moose Gulch's small, frame hotel, he was joined at the table by Art Maddox.

The marshal was a tall, raw-boned man with a long nose and protruding eyes that looked deceptively mild. His presence filled Hager with a vague dread.

"Heard Ben Cahill took sick and died while you were bringing him into town," Maddox began. "Sure is too bad. How did it happen?"

Hager explained, adhering closely to essential facts, though he omitted certain others and stretched a point here and there. He finished, "I tried to get Ben into town as fast as I could, but it was snowing hard and I almost got lost a couple of times. Ben was sick bad, and with the cold and all, he died on the way."

"It kind of looks like you expected that to happen," Maddox said.

Hager grew tense. "What do you mean?"

"The way you took the furs along kind of makes it look like you expected Ben Cahill to die. Besides, you ought to have known that the furs would slow you down on the trip to town."

"I was afraid to leave the furs at the cabin," Hager defended. "Suppose somebody stole them while me and Ben were gone? A whole season's catch. I just couldn't take a chance."

Maddox nodded with evident reluctance. "That's true enough, I guess. I was just sort of wondering about it." He stood up. "Well, sorry to have bothered you."

HAGER made a generous gesture. "No bother at all." He watched as Maddox left the room, grinning inwardly. Maddox apparently suspected something in his snooping, suspicious way, but the only point of attack he'd been able to find was one for which

Hager had a satisfactory explanation. Hager felt certain that he wouldn't be questioned again. And with the snow blotting out the erratic trail the sled had left, he was confident that he had nothing to fear from Maddox any longer.

The grin crept out around his square lips. He was safe. He had committed the perfect crime.

Hager checked in at the hotel, and after a pleasant evening spent at one of Moose Gulch's two saloons, he returned and went to bed. He had a restless night. The hotel was warm enough, and the covers on the bed thick, but a strange feeling of cold seemed to envelop him. And though he emptied the bottle of whisky he had brought with him, the cold persisted.

He slept fitfully. Once he dreamed that he was tied, naked, to the sled and being driven by Cahill through a terrific snow storm. The cold was so intense it seared him like fire. He awoke, shivering, a vivid recollection of Cahill's gaunt, accusing features in his mind. Again he seemed to hear Cahill's dying promise.

"You aren't going to get away with this, Matt. I'm going to get you. I'm going to make you pay."

And now, shuddering with that weird cold that seemed to enclose him like a huge, vengeful fist, Hager wondered.

The cold remained with him in the days that followed. It not only remained. It grew more unbearable.

Hager began to have a persecuted feeling. The cold stayed with him wherever he went. Even near hot stoves, or in heated rooms, he felt chilled. No one else seemed to notice it. The cold seemed intended for him alone. More and more, he wondered about Cahill's threat.

He was materialistic. He didn't believe in ghosts. But he knew that he

was being haunted by an unnatural cold that nobody else seemed able to feel.

He cast about for a method of escaping the cold. The obvious solution was to leave Moose Gulch, as he had intended all along. In his mind the cold was somehow connected with the settlement, through Cahill, who was buried there. A trip to one of the warm, southern regions in the States, he decided, should bring relief.

He sold the furs and with the money took passage on a plane that operated between the settlement and a large town some distance away. Continuing to travel by plane, he presently arrived in Seattle.

Still the cold remained with him. The miles he had put between Moose Gulch and himself hadn't done any good.

Nothing seemed to help. Heavy clothes, nourishing foods, whisky, vigorous exercise—nothing brought him the warmth he was beginning to crave as an addict craves dope.

Desperately, he resumed his trip, traveling by air and then by train, and finally grasping at any means of transportation that happened to be most convenient. The cold traveled with him. It enveloped him like a shell. It was an invisible prison, shutting him away from the world of warmth.

The climate grew increasingly mild and balmy as he progressed southward. But the chill that always surrounded him grew worse.

More often, now, he thought of Cahill's grim promise. "*I'm going to get you. I'm going to make you pay.*" It repeated itself over and over in his mind. It was emphasized by the invisible blanket of cold wrapped inescapably about him.

Once, in a hotel room where he had been drinking steadily, Hager's despair rose in him to the point of madness.

He leaped from the bed, hurling an empty whisky bottle against the wall, screaming mingled curses and entreaties.

"Damn you, Cahill, leave me alone! Haven't you had enough? How much longer are you going to keep torturing me? Leave me alone, do you hear? Leave me alone!"

Cahill didn't seem to hear. Or if he did, he paid no attention. The cold stayed.

HAGER began to lose weight. His stocky figure became gaunt, his cheeks sunken. Dark hollows cupped his feverishly bright eyes. His hands trembled. He jerked nervously at sudden noises.

In Los Angeles he yielded to a wild impulse and visited a doctor. He explained his symptoms, omitting their true cause, and pleaded for help.

The doctor gave him a complete physical examination, though it was evident from the man's expression of perplexity that he had learned nothing. "I can't understand it," he told Hager. "There's nothing seriously wrong with you. All you need is plenty of food and rest. You're probably just imagining things."

Hager groaned, paid his bill, and fled.

Several days later found him in Mexico. It was warm—but he didn't feel it. He knew with a terrible certainty that he would never feel warmth again. And he was tired of futilely trying to escape something from which there was no escape. He rented a small house on the outskirts of a town far from the Border and hired an elderly Mexican named Pancho to attend to his needs.

Pancho was a good servant. But he was evidently greatly puzzled by Hager. According to the stories Pancho told his cronies in the town, his *gringo*

master insisted that a hot fire be kept going constantly in the fireplace. And in this warm weather, too! As if that alone wasn't enough, the *gringo* also kept himself wrapped thickly in blankets. It was all very strange. The *gringo*, he said, was being tormented by a demon.

The people of the town, a simple folk to whom the supernatural was as real as the sun in the sky, were sympathetic. A priest at the church promptly volunteered his aid. He had, as Pancho subsequently explained to Hager when he appeared with the man, an enviable reputation for his skill in exorcizing devils and evil spirits.

Hager seized at the hope. He clutched at the priest eagerly.

"Try it! Pray for me! Do something—anything!"

The priest nodded gravely and began his task.

It worked.

Hager felt warm again.

A wild delight filled him. For the first time he became aware that the room was stifling, but the mere fact that he was able to feel it seemed the most wonderful thing in the world. He had a sense of freedom as complete as though he had been released into the sunlight after long confinement in a lightless dungeon.

He wrung the priest's hand, forced money on him, and then told Pancho he was throwing a *fiesta* for the entire town that evening. Pancho was to take care of the details immediately. No

expense was to be spared.

For the rest of the day, Hager soaked himself in the sunlight, reveling in the delicious warmth. And when evening came he attended the *fiesta* in high spirits. He ate *tortillas*, drank wine, and danced with innumerable dark-eyed *senoritas*.

It was late when he returned to the house with Pancho. He found a robed figure waiting patiently at the door. It was the priest. Something about the man's solemn expression filled Hager with dread.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Has something happened?"

In his halting English, Pancho translated the gist of the priest's explanation. "The *padre* say he no can help you, *señor*. He say he have how you call vision. It tell him you must pay."

There was more. But Hager didn't need any more to know that he was being refused further help for the crime he had committed.

A short while after the priest left he felt the cold again.

Pancho built a fire in the fireplace, and Hager crouched before it, huddled in blankets and shivering. He was still there when Pancho went to bed. And he was still there when Pancho awoke in the morning. But he was no longer shivering. He no longer felt the cold.

He was dead.

It had been a warm night. The fire had been hot, the blankets numerous and thick. Yet Hager had *frozen* to death.

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CASTLE OF TERROR

By E. J. LISTON



**What strange dimension was this where
giants, gangsters, Lucretia Borgia, dwarfs
and Rip Van Winkle lived at the same time?**



TOO BAD, Griffin," Hale Jenkins said to the man alongside. "Now if you'd have just stuck to bank stick-ups, you'd have been all right."

"Nah!" Bud Griffin said, his mouth twisted in a wry grin. "I'd have been all right if you'd have just stuck to being a traffic cop. But you had to show the Commissioner you were on the ball,

so he sent you after me. That's all."

The light suddenly flashed over the pilot's compartment with its warning to fasten safety belts. A few seconds later, the stewardess came around with a smiling warning that they were coming over some bad pockets, and that there was no need to worry.

Both men fastened their belts, as did all the other passengers on the giant airliner, and after a while the elevator began its ride. Griffin reached up and pulled the air vent down, so that the cold air of the upper reaches at which they were flying could send its refreshing drafts of air down the vent. Jenkins had been airsick once and didn't want any more of the same. He followed Griffin's gaze, and looked into the grey fog of a huge cloud bank.

Jenkins, to get his mind off the possibility of getting sick again, took up where the other had left off: "Yeah. But like I say, you shoulda stuck to robbin' banks."

His lean, strong face with the unusual bone structure which made it a face of highlights and plane surfaces, broke into a wide-angled grin. He threw the shock of black hair from his eyes, and continued: "Guys like you never learn. Gotta work with a heater."

Griffin's opaque eyes shifted from the greyness which had encircled the plane, and met the dancing grey ones of the detective beside him. Griffin's lips mimicked the grin of the other. But his words were not so light-hearted: "Look, copper! You just got lucky. If it weren't for that dame . . . Aah! I shoulda been smart. I shoulda known she'd of sung. No dame can keep her yap shut! But get this. We ain't in yet! So be smart and don't think Bud Griffin's fryin'. Not yet he ain't."

Jenkins was, for a detective, a rather amiable sort. In Griffin's case, however, he could not help but give an

occasional needle. The hoodlum and murderer's bragging rasped on Jenkins' nerves.

"Now, don't blame the girl," Jenkins said. "She was just the last step in my trail. The guy who really talked was Bud Griffin. There's a character who'll never stop talkin'. If you hadn't talked to the bartender in that joint on the waterfront, I'd have never found out about Myrtle. But he knew Myrtle and the kind of girl she was; he knew she only went for the hoods who had dough, and no guy who drinks beer like you do and leaves no tips ought to have dough. So when Myrtle walks in with a platina fox jacket and says you bought it, he gets mighty suspicious."

"It was a cinch then, Bud. All I had to do was tell the girl she was going to be named as an accessory after the fact, and she spilled her load."

PIN points of flame suddenly danced

in Griffin's eyes. His hands, lying quiescent on his lap, curled into balls of bone and muscle. Griffin had many weaknesses; of them all, anger was his greatest. For in the heat of anger he would do anything, and not care about the consequences. It had proved his undoing many times. His last surge of anger had resulted in murder during a robbery. The victim had resisted Griffin and had been shot in cold blood. As always, that anger showed in visible signs: there came the pin points of flame to the eyes, the clenching of fists, and an odd curling of the mouth. But Jenkins, either because he did not know of these signs, or because he was so wrapped in his own glory, did not notice the other's shifting movement.

When Griffin struck, it was with electric speed. Certainly, he had nothing to gain by his attack on Jenkins. For had he thought it out logically, he would have realized there was no way

of escape. Even a fool would have realized that there was no way of getting out of a plane which was flying at ten thousand feet, and coming down alive, unless one had a chute. So it was sheer berserk anger which prompted the attack.

Griffin's right elbow shot up and sideways, and landed with telling force against Jenkins' jaw. At almost the same instant, he slipped loose of his safety belt, whirled on his companion and struck him two savage blows with his fists. Those blows stunned the detective. And like a snake in movement, Griffin's hand reached for the pistol in Jenkins' holster and drew it.

Dazed as Jenkins was, he tried to stop Griffin. The barrel of the gun slashed a furrow in his cheek for the try. The blow rocked the detective's head back, and allowed him to get out of his seat. In an instant he was in the aisle, leaping for the pilot's compartment. He had no plan; he wasn't even thinking. In the background of his mind he knew the panic he had created; he could see it reflected in the face of the woman in the front seat, in the wide, suddenly terror-stricken eyes of the man at her side. But what he was going to do when he reached the closed door that was his goal, he did not know.

There were screams and hoarse commands. From the rear, the stewardess shouted for him not to go beyond the door. Griffin reached it, whirled and faced the length of the plane, a snarl on his lips, and the .38 in his hand, a small-barreled threat of death to whoever was fool enough to attempt to stop him.

And there was one who was going to be a fool.

WHETHER Jenkins was just dazed by the last blow, or whether he

really thought he could stop the other, is a matter of conjecture. But he rose to his feet and started forward in a stumbling run.

"Come on, copper," Griffin grunted, a terrible smile of anticipation on his lips. "I been wantin' to knock you off."

Everyone on the plane froze in horror as the gun muzzle came up. The finger on the trigger tightened in a sort of slow-motion action until it seemed as if the smallest pressure would set it off. And still Jenkins stumbled forward, until only a couple of feet separated the two. Then the grin became a snarl on Griffin's lips, and all knew the instant of death had arrived.

Jenkins must have felt it also, for he took the last few steps in a shambling, wide-armed leap, as if he were welcoming it. It was at that instant that the co-pilot decided to step through the door. The steel door slammed against the bent figure of the gunman just as he pulled the trigger. The gun went off with a roar, and Jenkins hit Griffin like a tackler slamming into a ball carrier.

But louder than the pistol's sound, was the sound from without the plane. It was as if all the fury of hell had exploded out there. The plane became a straw licked upward and outward, sucked downward and inward, in some vortex of sound and fury which was completely unrecognizable. It was as if some external force was venting its spleen on the craft. In the space of split seconds, in the time a picture forms in a mind, the plane and all its occupants lost their meaning.

There was a great rending sound and, following, the disintegration of the great ship into space.

HALE JENKINS felt himself spinning, whirling, falling into a vast empty fog. There was peace and con-

tentment in that fog, and a sort of forgetfulness. There was nothing above and nothing below, just the grey murk. For a last instant of awareness, Jenkins saw not far from him the body of Griffin describing the same gyrations as his own. Then there was a wrenching at his bowels, a tearing at his brain, and unconsciousness slipped over him like the noose over the hanged man.

Odd piping voices penetrated into Jenkins' brain. He stirred and rolled over, and after a few seconds got his hands under him and pushed himself erect. He felt rather than saw the tree close to him, and put one hand out to its friendly trunk, steadyng himself against it. His head came up after a second and his eyes cleared of the fog before them. He stared in disbelief as he looked out over a great valley.

In the distance, made plain by the brilliant light of the sun, he saw a tremendous castle with many-turreted immense sides. It shimmered and danced in the brilliant light, like a mirage conjured by a fevered mind. Yet he knew, without being told, that it was real—as real as the three tiny men who regarded him with passionately intent though oddly frightened eyes from a few feet off.

But sight was not the only sense of which Jenkins had the full use. He was aware of an odd, rumbling sound in the distance, as of thunder, yet not quite thunder. He noticed that the gnomes had also heard the sound, for their eyes turned from their intent regard of him, to the castle perched on the mesa in the distance. He could not see their eyes now, yet he was aware that they held fear—cold, numbing fear—fright so great it binds the entrails, makes a stone statue of a man, even a dwarf.

They held their poses even after the dying sounds of the strange rumble had

passed in the distance. When Jenkins spoke, it took several seconds for them to bring their attention to him:

"Where am I and who are you?"

Their answering voices were childish pipings, making even less sense of a confused situation:

"I am Loti . . ." said the smallest, who wore a fringe of beard from his forehead all the way around a pointed, slat-like chin.

"I am Gaino," said the second. He had a hooked nose so long it almost touched his chin.

"I am Mikas," said the third, who had a round face, a bulbous nose whose color was that of a ripe tomato, flapping pointed ears too large for his face, and a pair of perfectly round eyes.

"Yeah? But where am I?" Jenkins persisted.

"In the land of Gnat," all three piped in unison.

Slowly the brain-fog was clearing for Jenkins. The miracle of his landing safely was still not quite clear, nor could he understand the presence of these odd beings. But as reason returned to Jenkins, it told him something had happened which would perhaps be unexplainable.

He pointed toward the castle and said: "Who lives there?"

"Lucretia . . ." they answered again in unison.

Now there's a familiar name, Jenkins thought, while at the same time a horrifying idea occurred to him. If it were Lucretia Borgia, he thought, then he might be dead. Suddenly, there was a spine-chilling roar, a vast crashing in the underbrush close by, and a tremendous boulder sailed by and disappeared over the lip of the chasm. Its crashing echoes could be heard for a long time afterward. When Jenkins recovered his balance, the gnomes had disappeared.

Jenkins' eyes narrowed in search of them, but after one look at the thick underbrush, he turned aside and began to search for a path leading either through the brush or down the steep sides of the cliff. There wasn't much choice, he discovered. In fact, there was no choice at all.

"HO-HO!" a stentorian voice belowed, seemingly from at his very heels. "Look what we have here!"

Once more Jenkins did a pirouette. Facing him were three men. They seemed to come in series of threes in this screwy place, he thought. But these were quite different than the gnomes he had first seen.

These were giants, all dressed in the same manner. Each wore the skin of a wild animal draped about him. Only their middles were covered, and their immensely broad and hairy chests and legs, which were like tree-trunks, stood out in naked and unpretty relief. They had not known the touch of a razor for a very long time. Their beards reached almost to their waists, while their heads were crowned with a tangled growth of wiry brush.

Each man was armed with a spiked club, on which he was resting as he regarded the stranger.

"He's mine," one said suddenly. "I saw him first."

"No!" the second said. "You're the youngest. I'm the oldest. I get him."

"And I'm the strongest," said the third. "I'll take him." The last one didn't wait for a reply, but leaped for Jenkins in a clumsy jump.

Only Jenkins didn't wait for him. He stepped aside as the giant came on, and as he went past Jenkins tripped him by simply putting out his leg. The giant went sailing off into space and as he stumbled over the lip of the chasm, his scream of fear was drowned

in the roars of rage which came from the other two. They came at him on splay feet, their clubs raised high, their mouths opened and their eyes slitted in rage. But they were slow and clumsy, and Jenkins danced out of range.

The giants recovered their balance, turned and came at him again, this time from opposite sides. Jenkins waited until they were almost upon him before moving. The two had their clubs raised as they ran, and just as Jenkins leaped, they swung their murderous weapons. If it weren't for the deadly seriousness of the situation, Jenkins would have found vast humor in it. For in the swinging, both missed him, but one, the youngest, caught his partner squarely on the skull with the spiked club. The stricken one fell like an ox at the slaughter.

SLOBBERING sounds of rage came from the remaining giant. His beady eyes were red-rimmed, and his voice shook in passion as he charged again. And once more Jenkins danced away. But this time the smile was wiped from the Earthman's lips, as his moving steps struck against a protruding root, and he went sprawling backward.

Rage turned to triumph! The club came on high and began its descent. And Jenkins could only watch it in horror. The terrible club gained speed, size, terror in its immensity, as it descended. And Jenkins seemed chained to the earth by a power greater than his will. The club was inches away, and Jenkins closed his eyes to it and made a silent prayer.

There was a dull thud as the club dropped from the giant's hand to the ground. And another thud as the body of the giant landed with breath-taking force across that of the Earthman. Jenkins grunted in pain. He shoved at the

inert figure sprawled across him and rolled it to one side. His breath whistled through his nostrils as he arose and brushed the dirt from him and he wondered dully how he had been saved.

"They are as children," a voice replied to his unspoken question. "And like children, they can't reason . . ."

The whistle came from his lips this time, as he did a double-take at the figure which confronted him. She was standing not three feet from him, a tall, lissome figure, dressed in a sheer costume which hid her figure, yet left enough to be seen to entrance the eye. Midnight black hair, a beautifully carved throat, perfection for nose and lips, and eyes haughty as a queen's, made up the rest of her. He could only stare, open-mouthed in admiration, lost in her beauty.

A faint smile touched her lips as she advanced toward him. He caught the movement of others, also, and from the corners of his eyes saw that she had not come alone. Attending her were mailed bodyguards wearing sixteenth century armor.

"I thought the other came alone," Lucretia said, "but now I see I was wrong. He is up there. You will be there, too."

"Up there?" Jenkins asked somewhat foolishly, pointing to the castle in the distance.

"Yes. Up there. Come along, now." She turned and moved away from him, and the mailed men took her place.

This time Jenkins made no move of protest. The long swords and small knives these men carried in their belts made foolish any attempt to fight them.

IT TOOK a great deal less time to reach the castle than Jenkins would have thought possible. Yet, there were no means of transportation other than walking. The castle was much like one

Jenkins remembered in a movie he had seen. A huge drawbridge swung down over the wide and deep moat before the perpendicular walls of the castle, trumpets sounded and mailed guards ran to appointed places at the castle's entrance. The beautiful creature nodded in acknowledgment of their salute as she stepped past them, Jenkins at her side and the eight bodyguards, two abreast, walking behind. Thus they proceeded up the long and narrow courtyard through another entrance, and into an inner courtyard which preceded the entrance hall proper to the castle.

Things happened at a greater pace from then on. At her signal men came forward, took Jenkins with them and, from then until his return to the woman, he was bathed, shaved, and dressed in a wondrously brocaded gown. When he returned, it was to find her in the immense banquet hall.

She motioned him forward and bade him sit at her right. His eyes went wide when he saw who was at her left—Griffin. And dressed in a gown similar to his own.

"Hi, chum," Griffin said. "Nice layout, huh?"

"I like him," Lucretia said, as she signalled for the food to be brought in. "He has such ill manners and such a boorish way of expressing himself."

Jenkins swallowed in haste as his eyes took in the rest of the company around the table. Never in all his days of police work had he seen such a collection of cutthroats. Yet they, as he, were dressed in finery that was worth a fortune. They saw his stare and answered him with wide grins, which somehow had the power to make his blood run cold.

"Aah!" she continued. "They like you, I see. Ah, well. It's company fit for a Borgia."

Borgia—Lucretia Borgia—the infamous poisoner—the most hated woman of her time. He turned for another quick look and wondered how a woman with such beauty could . . . He shook his head violently. And again she seemed to read his mind.

"My beauty is something I had nothing to do with. Perhaps you may come to hate it."

SUDDENLY a vast anger filled Jenkins' breast. His nostrils dilated in passion, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse with it: "Look! I don't know what's going on. But whatever it is, I don't like it. Now get this! I'm a cop, and the character sitting alongside of you is my prisoner. And I'm going to take him come hell or high water!"

A ripple of laughter began which swelled to a roar as he finished. And the one who laughed the loudest was Lucretia.

"Now tell me, my valorous warder," she said in dulcet tones, "how will you do this?"

"In don't know," Jenkins answered darkly and somewhat foolishly. "But I'll manage. And another thing," he went on after a few seconds, "what's with this rigmarole you're playing?"

"Rigmarole?" Her voice broke into tinkling laughter. "Oh, come now! We don't play games here. I'm really Borgia. So let us sup. Talk will come later."

A servant had placed a dish before Jenkins from which the most appetizing odors arose. Saliva formed in his mouth, and his empty belly reminded him he hadn't eaten for a long time. He raised his fork and started to dig in, but the gesture was never completed. For suddenly he became aware that every eye was on him and that every mouth was twisted in a grin, that laughter hung silently on the air ready to explode at

the right second. They were but waiting for him to taste the food.

Nerveless fingers dropped the fork, and Jenkins' gulp was audible. He knew why the grins and stares. *The food was poisoned!* Yet the others were eating, loudly, gaspingly, tearing at the food with fingers and jaws, eating as though it was the last meal they were ever to have.

"Come, man! Eat!" the woman said between mouthfuls. She, like the rest, held little regard for manners.

"I-I'm not hungry," Jenkins said lamely.

"Too bad. It's so good!" Lucretia remarked. Her eyes were daring him.

There seemed to be dozens of courses, and Jenkins' hunger grew with each serving. More than hunger seethed in his breast, however. Anger also gnawed at him. Anger got the better at last. He shoved his chair from the table, and it clattered backward on stumbling legs. All eyes turned to him as he stood, his hands on his hips, his head shoved forward, chin jutting out like a rock.

"I've had just about enough of this!" Jenkins announced loudly. "I'm going. And you, Griffin, are coming with me."

Gone now were the smiles; gone the laughter. The eyes were cold and oddly expectant. Jenkins grew aware of the tense silence. He grinned, and began to withdraw slowly.

"Okay," he said softly, "so I'll go alone."

"Not even that way," Lucretia said. "My guests leave only at *my bidding*."

AS THOUGH her words were a command, two of the men at opposite ends of the table rose and started for Jenkins. Their hands were wrapped about the hilts of the short swords stuck in their belts. Jenkins continued to retreat slowly, though, until his foot

struck against the chair which he'd shoved back. Then he moved like greased lightning.

His right hand swept around, gathered up the chair and flung it skidding across the floor, so that it wound up among the folds of the robe worn by one of the men. At the same time Jenkins leaped toward his other would-be attacker and chopped a right hook to his whiskered chin.

It was the signal for a general rush in Jenkins' direction, but Jenkins wasn't waiting. He hadn't even waited to see the effect of his hook. The instant the blow was delivered, he had turned and leaped for the wide entrance. He ran with all speed, his mind busy trying to remember the turns and danger points which might lie before him.

There was no need of that, he discovered. The shouting voices which bayed the alarm brought other guards to the chase. Jenkins came to a sliding halt as he made a turn in the corridor. The grin was still wide on his lips when his capturers brought him back to face Lucretia.

"I find it unseemly," she said as the guards forced him into a chair, "that a guest should feel so strongly about not wanting my hospitality. Surely, I have not been amiss in my attentions? If so, I must remedy that."

A roar of laughter went up at the words.

"Therefore," she went on, "we will do more than we have. Take him below and make him feel as welcome as he should have felt from the beginning."

SWEAT streamed from the dank walls. Feeble light came from a pair of torches set into wall brackets, light which was offset by the heavy smoke the resinous torches gave forth.

A dozen cloaked figures stood around the almost naked figure of a man chained wrists, ankles, and neck to the wall. Standing directly in front of the chained man, and facing him, was another man, with a look of cunning cruelty on his face. The one chained to the wall was Jenkins; and the man facing him was Griffin.

"Look, my friend," Lucretia Borgia said to Griffin, "all about you are the implements of the trade. Here," she pointed with daintily gesturing fingers to a many-thonged whip, "is a tickler to make this fool dance. And when he tires, why here," she pointed to something which looked like a coal scuttle, "we have a bucket in which he can rest his wearied feet. Of course you may have to heat it a trifle, but I'm sure he won't mind."

The others shouted in glee at the humor they found in her remark.

Jenkins listened in bitter silence. The only visible sign of his desperate feelings was a tiny trickle of blood which seeped from one corner of his mouth and ran down to the side of his chin. He had given up straining against the steel chains which bound him. They had been set too strongly into the wall. He prayed that he could take the physical tortures to be inflicted on him without weakening.

Then Griffin was reaching for the steel-tipped whip, and Jenkins braced himself for the pain.

"Make him dance!" Lucretia commanded. "Pride needs music . . ." She stopped suddenly and her head came up. The others also froze into listening attitudes.

Jenkins had been aware of the odd sound for several minutes. He had presumed that the others were too interested in what was going on down in the cold, dank dungeon to be disturbed by sounds from the upper world. The

sound had a rumbling vibration, the rumble grew louder and louder, and suddenly there was an ear-splitting crash. Dust and chips flew from the walls.

"The giants!" Lucretia screamed in wild terror. "They are bowling again."

AS ONE, everybody turned and began a pell-mell race for the stairs, until there was only the chained man left. And hard at their heels came another of the ear-splitting crashes. More chips flew, and now tiny streamers of water leaped from cracks which appeared in the stone. Again there was the roar, another crash, and Jenkins moaned in pain as a large chunk of rock struck his side and tore the flesh.

He strained against the steel chains which bound him until he thought his blood would burst the bounds of his veins. He pulled again and again and until he could strain no more, until he could only fall limply against his prison-links.

His mind was fevered and his thoughts jumbled. He had to escape somehow. Again there was heard that terrorizing crash. He gasped, and turned his head aside, as a torrent of water poured from a fissure in the rock close to his head and shot into his face.

He turned his head and felt the metal tear from the wall. His head was free. Like a madman, Jenkins tried again to loose himself. This time he succeeded. And where the chains pulled free, water dribbled from that spot.

With a desperate intensity, Jenkins made a superhuman effort and pulled at the chains binding his wrists. The chains came apart, tearing the flesh and leaving raw wounds. Wincing at the pain, he placed his fingers behind his neck and felt of the steel. After a few seconds of probing, he twisted at

the nut, which separated from the bolt with a single easy twist. He did the same with the chain binding his ankles — and Jenkins was free!

The last length of chain fell into the water, which by now had formed a foot-deep puddle on the floor, and splashed loudly, as Jenkins raced against a new danger. Whatever was causing those crashing sounds was also weakening the foundations of the castle. Water was beginning to pour in a perfect torrent from many cracks. The stairs to the floor above was but twenty feet from where he had been chained, but even in that short distance the water rose another foot.

JENKINS took the wide stone steps three at a time, and raced like wild around the short curves. He had oriented himself as they brought him down, and he knew exactly where he was going. Danger lay at the very top of the stairs, for here they were heavily guarded. Yet, when he reached the head of the stairs, not a soul was to be seen.

He became cautious, then. Being weaponless, Jenkins knew he would have to rely on stealth. Slowly he advanced, until he was at the very threshold of the large banquet hall. Now he heard voices, voices raised in anger.

The loudest, most shrill of these voices, the one who commanded attention, was that of Lucretia Borgia: "You fools! Dolt heads! When this is over I shall have you all flayed alive. Did not any of you recognize the king of the giants as the one who was fighting the stranger? Now they are *bowling* against us. And who among us can challenge them?"

"I can, baby." Jenkins recognized that voice. It belonged to Griffin. "Duck pins, ten pins or any other kind. I'll match my hook with the best of

them."

There was a short interval of silence. When Lucretia broke it, she spoke in more natural tones: "It isn't the giants I'm worried about. I have seen them bowl. They rely on strength only. The dwarfs are the ones I'm worried about. We beat them the last time because they used the man from Earth and we got him drunk. They are cunning little men. Are you sure, my friend, that you have the skill?"

But Jenkins didn't wait to hear the answer. He knew Griffin had the skill. For Griffin, in his varied and checkered career, had once won an A.B.C. tournament. It was the clue by which he had been able to trace Griffin in his chase across the continent.

Jenkins peered into the hall. The men were all clustered around the woman, listening intently to her words. Silently, he fled from the banquet hall, and in a single leap crossed the open courtyard. From there on he threw caution to the winds. Oddly enough he could have walked, for not a single guard was to be seen even at the gate to the drawbridge. Although the bridge was up, Jenkins didn't hesitate for an instant. He dived in, and the waters of the moat closed over him.

But the moat was not wide, nor was it too deep. Ten strokes and he was across. The moon flooded the night with light, and his path was clear before him. After reaching the opposite bank, Jenkins started for the depths of the forest. But just as he reached it an odd procession marched out.

AT THE head were the three dwarfs Jenkins had first met upon recovering consciousness. Behind them streamed a host of other dwarfs. And from what was evidently another path into the forest came another procession. Although this group was not as large in

number, in size the men were gigantic. The two processions saw Jenkins at the same time, and both groups started toward him. Had it not been for the three little men, Jenkins couldn't imagine what fate might have befallen him.

"Ho!" shouted the dwarf called Loti. "It is the one who was taken to the castle. Come, my friend, we go to the castle. To bowl. For the *good woman* who rules there has made the mistake which might free us of her rule."

She permitted one of our giant brethren to be killed by one of her men. And now we go to bowl against her champions. See, Mikas carries our ball."

Jenkins looked at the one to whom Loti had gestured, and saw that in truth the little man was carrying a bowling ball, a ball which was in no way different from those Jenkins had himself used in his world.

"Aye," Loti continued. "Now we have again the chance to rid ourselves of her shackles."

The leaders of the giants had joined them while they were talking. One of them interrupted: "Aye. Loti is right. We sent the boulders down against them from the heights. Now we go to bowl."

Jenkins grinned as he started back for that castle of terror which he'd just quitted. He blinked in surprise when he saw that the drawbridge had been lowered. The dwarfs and the giants were apparently expected, but they would certainly be amazed to see him.

"You!" Lucretia exclaimed when she saw him. "How did you escape?"

He shrugged his shoulders and stared coldly into her beautiful eyes. She frowned back at him, then turned and motioned for her men to follow. Their way was lit by torchbearers; and led up a winding path which ended on a

level bit of highland directly behind the castle. Here was grass land smooth as velvet; here were the grounds of combat, bloodless but just as decisive.

There was a single alley, at the far end of which stood ten pins. Jenkins measured the alley with his eyes and figured it to be just about the length of a conventional bowling alley. The backstop was built up of earth and was soft enough so that the pins would not splinter on striking it.

"We all know the rules," Lucretia said. "To the victor goes the rule of our land. To the loser, slavery. Therefore, let us begin. Since I hold title, I choose to have my champion bowl last."

THE giant's man bowled first against Loti. Just as Lucretia had said, he had speed but that was all. Loti had a much slower ball, but one that knocked down more pins on his hits. The giant got too many splits and railroads to be able to beat the little man.

Then, after a short wait, Griffin took the alley against Loti. And from the first ball, Jenkins saw that the little man stood no chance. Griffin's hook worked beautifully on the velvet grass lawn. He literally swamped Loti, whose shoulders slumped in weariness and discouragement as Griffin struck out.

"And so we remain slaves once more," Loti said, as the pin setter set up the last rack. "Once, when the man called Rip Van Winkle bowled, I thought we had a chance. But she got him drunk and we lost that match. Now this."

Lucretia was elated. As the last strike scattered the pins, she ran up to Griffin and planted a kiss on his lips.

"My champion!" she crowed. "Now we will take care of these big and little creatures once and for all. Once I was generous. Now I will be otherwise."

"Maybe!" Jenkins suddenly spoke.

"But we're not through bowling. I am now of the people here, and I challenge the winner of the two matches."

Loti caught up the other's words:

"He speaks true. He has the right to challenge."

"Is it true," Jenkins asked, "that the winner has the right to give terms?"

"Aye," Loti said.

"Then let's bowl," Jenkins said.

He tried the grip of the ball Loti passed to him. It was a two-fingered grip, and just a little small. As the challenger, Jenkins had to bowl first. He measured the distance carefully, tried to figure the angle into the pocket, took a three-step run and let his ball go in a medium swing. The ball hooked in neatly, and left a four-seven split. A laugh arose from Lucretia's followers. But silence fell among them as Jenkins made the pickup.

"Nice shot, copper," Griffin said, as he stepped up to bowl, and made a strike. From then on, they matched strikes to the eighth frame when Griffin hit the head pin directly and got a seven-ten railroad. He picked up the ten-pin. Jenkins had gotten a nine count and made the spare.

IN THE ninth frame, Jenkins struck. Griffin stepped up, wiped his right hand carefully against the trousers he had donned, took aim with great care, and sent the ball down the side of the alley. It hooked in nicely and again hit the head pin directly, only this time the six, ten, four and seven pins were left standing. So badly shot was he by the bad break, that he fumbled the ball as he started for his second shot. But he recovered quickly and neatly made the spare, the four pin barely grazing the ten.

The score as they started the tenth frame was 206 for Griffin and 209 for Jenkins.

Jenkins knew he had to mark at the least to win, and a double to make it close if Griffin got a double. Minutes went by while Jenkins made his last sight. Then he took three quick steps and let the ball go. But just as he reached the foul line, Jenkins slipped. The grass had become slick with all the running being done on its surface. And the ball, instead of hooking, went straight in, and left a very bad railroad, the four-ten.

Griffin's sigh of relief was the only sound to break the silence, as Jenkins stepped up for his second shot. He knew there was but one chance to make it, one chance alone.

If he could but get the ball over just right, it could make the four slide over against the ten.

Thunderous roars rent the air, and piping screams of delight, as the giants and the dwarfs saw the dreaded fourteen split made! The strike Jenkins hit for his last shot was an anti-climax. The score stood at 249 for Jenkins.

"Nice shot," Griffin said as he stepped up. "But all I need is a double." He threw, and the ten pins fell. His second ball was also a strike.

"And just to show you how good I am," Griffin declared, as he held the ball for the last throw, "I'm going to make just four pins so you won't feel too bad."

Only he didn't! For what had happened to Jenkins, happened to him. His foot also slipped on the grass, and this time he got three pins. The score was tied.

Suddenly Jenkins sat down, removed his shoes and stood erect. He wasn't going to take a chance on his last ball, for that was the rule on a tie. One ball until the tie was broken, and a strike was just a strike. There was no question of what Jenkins threw the instant he released the ball. Right in the pock-

et!

Griffin's ball left the hard one, the ten pin. Griffin was still stooped, his hands on his hips and his face forlorn, when Jenkins' hand fell on his shoulder.

"I said I was taking you in, Griffin," Jenkins said. "And come hell or high water, I'm going to."

Griffin shrugged the hand off as he whirled on the other. "Don't be a fool!" he spat. "Do you think we're alive?"

"Rip Van Winkle was," Jenkins said, cryptically. "And I think we are, too."

"He is quite right, my friend," Loti said, as he stepped up to them. "I can send you back, both of you, back to the time and place of your leavetaking. This instant . . ."

JENKINS felt a wave of blackness wash over him, a terrible wrenching at his innards, and a sudden thrust. He opened his eyes and looked about. There was a pain in his left shoulder, and he could feel a sticky wetness running down his arm. Griffin stood before him, and in Griffin's eyes was a dazed look. Behind Griffin, the door to the pilot's cabin swung crazily. Before Griffin knew what hit him, Jenkins had leaped upon him. It took one blow, a terrific hook to the man's jaw, and Griffin slumped to the floor.

"What happened?" Jenkins asked as the stewardess bandaged his shoulder where Griffin's shot had caught him.

"Why," she said, "he shot, you went backward. Then, and it's the only way I can describe it, you both seemed to freeze up for an instant. The next thing I knew, you had recovered and the fight was over."

But Jenkins knew better. He knew that in those few seconds, space and time had changed for himself and Griffin, and it was a lucky bowling match which had brought them back.

FLOATING ON AIR

By FRAN FERRIS



So you think it can't be done? Well, read this and be convinced, and no yuga either!



THE phrase "floating on air" is frequently used to describe anything which works smoothly unencumbered by the forces of friction. But it is ordinarily merely a figure of speech. There are a few cases, however, where that is not true. Some machines have been designed whose parts do float on air in the exact sense of the phrase.

One of the ways of testing the strength, the tensile strength of alloy steels, is to pull the steel apart between the jaws of a powerful rupturing machine. This operation gives a measure of the strength of the material. Another way of exerting great forces to tear steel alloys apart without involving such gigantic machines, is by use of a suitable centrifuge. The material to be tested is made the rotor of the centrifuge, and it is whirled about until it tears itself in pieces. One of the difficulties of this method is finding how to support the rotating member while the forces are applied. In one type of machine, the material under test is supported in the form of a steel ball balanced on a column of compressed air. This ingenious arrangement enables the material to be supported without friction and it can be given its rotary motion through an external revolving magnetic field.

The primary point of all this, is the fact that friction can be eliminated if some method can be found of supporting the object to be rotated on something besides conventional bearings. The column of air was one answer to the problem.

Going from the case of extreme forces to the one of little forces, consider the problems of instrument design. In most mechanical instruments such as clocks, watches, electrical meters, gauges and the like, the major element is a member which rotates under the influence of one force or another and to which an indicator is attached. It is desirable that this rotating element have little friction associated with it, because friction decreases sensitivity, increases errors and above all, causes wear with time resulting in the eventual ruin of the device.

So fine instruments like electric watt-hour meters as well as others, have used jeweled bearings consisting of little artificial sapphires serving as the pivot points in which the rotor can work.

This has worked so well, that for example, an electric company will call for an examination of its electric meters in homes and industries, only once every eight years or so.

But now, a new method of instrument rotor suspension has been designed by scientists of the General Electric Company. Because new magnetic alloys have been created with tremendous magnetic strength in small volumes of metals, it is now possible to devise an almost absolutely frictionless rotor movement.

After almost ten years of testing and creating, these scientists have built and have available for commercial use, an electric watt-hour meter, whose rotating element is suspended by two magnet fields. In other words the apparatus hangs in air, supported on two magnetic fields! This ingenious instrument improvement has been tested under all conditions of operation and it works perfectly.

The only case where friction can enter this picture, is in the guides of stainless steel which operate against bushings of graphite. And here any chance of friction is extremely slight. The guides and bushings only serve to prevent side wobble, and the forces involved are tiny. In the old jeweled bearings, the frictional forces were measured in terms of hundreds of tons per square inch. In the new bearings the frictional forces are figured in terms of hundreds of pounds per square inch, a reduction of one two-thousandth.

This development promises to revolutionize the instrument industry. As yet the new bearings have been applied purely to electric watt-hour meters. But they may also be used in any kind of similar instrument.

It is as if we were on the verge of some very important changes. Applied science is becoming incredibly refined and shrewd. Nothing is being neglected. If you look about you, you will notice that machines are ever growing simpler instead of more complex. And at the same time they are being made more durable. As time goes on and these developments increase, we can look forward to the time when eventually we may bequeath machinery to our descendants just as we bequeath land to them. "I'll leave my '48 car to you son, when I die in '98." Well perhaps not exactly that!

PHANTOM of the FOREST

by LEE FRANCIS

**Every year men slaughter deer by
the thousands; it seems only fitting that
the tables be turned once in a while . . .**

THE automobile reached the crest of the hill, skidded and started toward the ditch. Earl Robinson twisted the wheel savagely, got the feel of the ice hidden under the snow, and deftly straightened the car. Roy Starr awakened at his side and sat up. His eyes were narrowed with sleep.

"Lord," he groaned, "how much farther?"

Robinson spoke through gritted teeth.

"About three miles. Might as well be a million."

The car was moving forward about twenty miles per hour. Three people slept in the rear seat. They were packed under pieces of equipment. There were half a dozen guns stacked across their feet.

The snow came down thickly, endlessly. It drifted across the road. Almost eight inches had fallen since sundown. Tomorrow, there won't be any traffic moving, Robinson thought, not without a plow to break the trail. The valley will be a lost world.

"Shangrila," he said softly.

"Huh?" Roy Starr was almost asleep once more.

Robinson said, "Skip it."

He was thinking about the war, and the deep, lost valleys he flew into when he flew the "hump."

He tried to concentrate on the road once more. They had come six miles from Indian River. The road was just a white line, leading up and down long rows of dark evergreens. The snow filled the air, tangling his thoughts, filling the world with stinging, blinding particles of white. The snow actually seemed to hurt his eyes. It seemed to be hitting his eyeballs.

He shook his head angrily. *Sleep* was stinging his eyes. He watched the trackless road with an intensity of a man hovering between life and death. *Sleep*—and death. Trying desperately to avoid both.

One more long hill.

Taking a long chance, he pressed the gas pedal down as far as it would go. The motor roared, protested and the car leaped ahead like a monster alive. The speedometer said fifty—then fifty-five. Sixty. At sixty they hit the sharp incline. Roy Starr was wide awake now, holding tightly to the door-handle, as though it insured him against an accident. Someone stirred in the back seat.

"Almost there?" It was a girl's voice, sleepy and disinterested.

"Almost," Earl Robinson said, and twisted the wheel again. The car went crosswise with the road. It slid forward, up the hill, careened wildly and straightened its course once more.



With a burst of speed, the magnificent buck rushed past him

Robinson sighed.

"Close," he said.

"*Earl, for God's sake, stop!!*"

Roy Starr's voice welled out of him, filled with stark horror. Robinson saw the weird, shadowy form on the road just in time. He pressed hard on the brake and the car jerked into the ditch, and stopped with a sickening jolt.

The girl in the rear seat clawed her way forward, clutching Starr's shoulder.

"A man on the road," she cried. "Earl, you hit him."

She started sobbing as though her heart were breaking.

"Shut up," Robinson snapped. His nerves had reached the breaking point. Then, in a gentler voice. "There's a man there all right, Marge. I didn't hit him. Get hold of yourself. Glenn, Glenn, take care of her, will you?"

ALL three people in the rear seat were wide awake now. Glenn Starr, dark, serious, in full control of his wits, drew the sobbing girl back beside him.

"Take it easy, kid," he said. "Earl will take care of everything. We haven't done anything wrong."

The other man, sitting on the far side of the car, pushed the door open and climbed out.

"Man, this is a storm, and I don't mean perhaps. Nice little ditch we got ourselves into."

Robinson and Roy Starr got out. Roy pulled his collar up tightly around his neck. He walked back a few paces and kneeled beside the snow buried corpse. Earl Robinson, tall, solid, stood over him as he pushed away the snow.

"Nobody I know," Roy said, and turned away so he wouldn't have to stare at the dead, frozen face.

Robinson bent over and pushed more

snow away.

"I'll be damned."

The chest was badly crushed. Blood had frozen in the snow next to the wound.

"Hit sometime before the snow came," Robinson said.

Roy Starr was brushing snow away from the corpse.

"Maybe," he said softly. "A car never hit him, though. There aren't any blood tracks. The hole is in the direct center of his chest. The ribs aren't crushed on either side."

Robinson's voice was a little hushed.

"That's what I was thinking. Looks like a bear might have mauled him."

Roy Starr came slowly to his feet.

"Look," he said, "we aren't kidding ourselves. Something hit him, hard, in the chest. It wasn't a car because it didn't break in the whole bone structure. It wasn't a bear, because a bear would have done a more thorough job of it. Shooting is out. That isn't a bullet wound."

Robinson shrugged.

"What's left?"

"The same thing that's been killing hunters for the past five years," Starr said grimly. "For lack of a better name, the phantom buck."

Robinson turned away, looking toward the car.

"You're crazy," he said. "Let's say we're both crazy. Our imaginations are running riot. I think the rest of the party ought to know about the *automobile accident*. We can't do any good here. We'll go on to Rosewood if we can get the buggy out of the ditch. We can call the sheriff from there. This is the sheriff's job, not ours."

The three people who had ridden in the rear seat were in the ditch, pushing snow away from the wheels. Glenn Starr was saying quietly:

"We ought to get him out of the

road."

Robinson went to work with the shovel, digging the right rear wheel out of the snow and the thick, half-frozen mud.

"Forget all about it," he said. "No one will be driving through here tonight. We'll call the sheriff from Rosewood. Outside of that, it's none of our business. Automobile accident. Wasn't our fault. We've done all we can."

They worked hard, all of them trying to forget the body on the road and concentrate on the task of freeing the car from the ditch. In twenty minutes they were on their way, crawling slowly down the opposite side of the hill into the cup-like valley where a country store, church and schoolhouse had been flatteringly named "Village of Rosewood!"

Marjorie Wrenn was still crying softly. Glenn tried to comfort her, but the girl was exhausted mentally and physically. The snow still blotted out everything but a few yards of the road. Once in the valley, Robinson released his grip on the wheel and relaxed.

"Roy," he said softly.

"Yea?"

"About that phantom buck story. I wouldn't talk too much. On the square, though I'm inclined to wonder."

Roy Starr's voice sank to a whisper. "You think—maybe . . . ?"

"Yea," Robinson answered, "I think—maybe . . . "

THE electric light flashed on, making the world of swirling snow friendly once more. The car was parked beside the house, close to the barn. The place was a huge country store with the living quarters attached like a toad-stool to the side of it. There was a wood-pile in the yard, hidden under a foot of snow, looking like a crouching, white

monster. A single pole had been buried in the ground, and from it hung a six-point buck. The deer had been gutted, and blood made little red blobs on the snow.

Glenn Starr climbed out and helped Marjorie Wrenn to the ground. He saw the overcoated figure emerging from the woodshed.

"Norm, you old horse. Got any snake bite medicine?"

Norm Boody, a well fed duplicate of Slim Summerville, was clad in a heavy overcoat drawn over a flannel night-shirt. His feet were hidden in vast, felt slippers.

"Thought you people weren't gonna get here. It's almost three in the morning. About those snake bites. What's the matter? Snow snakes biting tonight?"

The others were getting stiffly out of the car.

Earl Robinson said solemnly:

"Those snow snakes bite before you can go ten feet. We had a little trouble, Norm."

Boody found a half filled bottle in his coat and passed it around.

"Bad country to drive in a storm," he said.

"Worse than usual," Robinson said. "There is a dead man laying down the road a mile or two."

Norm Boody gulped from the bottle, choked and spewed the whiskey on the snow.

"It—wasn't Bill, was it?"

Robinson shook his head.

"No one I know. Dressed in hunter's outfit. Didn't find his gun. Probably buried under the snow."

Boody sighed. He looked uncertain.

"Bill went into Indian River for some stuff. He didn't come back."

"Look," Glenn said suddenly. "Marge is freezing and we're all tired out. We better get inside."

Norm Boody sprang toward the door and held it open.

"Sure, sure," he said. "The wife's got both coffee pots steaming by now. I oughta be shot for not getting this poor girl inside the minute she came. It ain't fit weather . . ."

Robinson smiled.

"Let's get to that coffee."

Inside, they all greeted Mrs. Boody. While she poured coffee into the cups on the kitchen table, Robinson cornered Norm Boody and led him into the living room. It was a low-ceilinged, warm, homey place. A telephone hung on the far wall. Robinson dialed the sheriff's number at Indian River, put the receiver back in place, lifted it and tried again. He shook his head.

"Trouble?" Boody asked.

"The line must be down. Phone won't work. Guess we'll sleep tonight and make that call in the morning."

The two men sat down in the darkness of the living room. Mrs. Boody, a grey headed, smiling woman who looked as though she might be anyone's mother, came in with two steaming cups.

"You better drink before you freeze," she said. "That darned stove takes so long to heat up."

She turned to her husband.

"Norm, what's wrong?"

Norm Boody grimaced.

"Man dead down the road. Something mauled him. Killed before the snow came this evening. Earl most ran over him."

THE room was deathly silent for a moment. Then the woman's voice came, almost in a sob.

"Norm, Norm, it wasn't Bill, was it?"

Robinson said quickly:

"It wasn't Bill. I saw the face. No one I've ever seen before."

"Thank God for that," Mrs. Boody said. "You called the sheriff?"

"Can't," Norm Boody said. "Line's out of order. We'll get in touch with town in the morning."

"I don't think we'll sleep much tonight," a soft voice said from the door.

Earl Robinson chuckled. It was an attempt to put the whole thing off lightly. It didn't sound very sincere.

"You'll sleep all right, Marjorie. After that trip, we'll all sleep."

The girl smiled wanly.

"I hope so. It's hard—thinking of that—that . . ."

Daylight brought a peaceful, untroubled look to the valley. For ten miles, without a track save for the animals who had moved during the night, the valley stretched upward on all sides to the wooded hills. The big general store, schoolhouse and country church nestled in the center of the snow cup, with trackless roads leading away to the four points of the compass.

Blue-gray smoke lifted straight upward from the house, drifted two hundred feet into the sky and wafted away into nothingness.

Robinson came out of the woodshed with his black and red plaid coat wrapped tightly around him. It was a grand hunting morning, and he didn't intend to let last night's incident spoil it. The country was beautiful but there was nothing gentle about it. You had to face violence and forget it—quickly. Death wasn't easy to look at, but here, people learned that when it came, there was no point in letting it interfere with their life.

Bill Boody hadn't come in last night. His car wasn't to be seen. Robinson went back into the woodshed. He climbed the steps to the kitchen and walked in quietly behind Mrs. Boody, who was bent over the kitchen stove

"Where's Norm?" he asked.

Mrs. Boody looked worn and tired, as though she hadn't slept.

"Milking the cows. Bill didn't come home last night."

He knew that she was still suspicious of him. She wasn't sure that he told the truth about the body on the road.

"Bill will be okay," he said. "Are any of the others up?"

Mrs. Boody smiled.

"Roy came out a few minutes ago. He took one look at the thermometer outside the kitchen window, groaned and went back to bed."

Robinson started for the bedroom.

"You better let Marge sleep," Mrs. Boody said. "She was all worn out. She needs the rest."

"Earl," the woman at the stove said. There was a quality of urgency in her voice that stopped him short. He pivoted.

"Yes?"

"You think the phantom buck might have done the killing?"

Here it was again, he thought. They weren't satisfied to let the whole thing pass as an accident. They had to bring up dead dogs, fall back on superstition. Everything was perfect for hunting, and they had to spoil the spirit of the thing.

"That phantom buck business is a damned fairy tale," he said.

"But you think it was the phantom buck, all the same."

Robinson said nothing. The woman pushed the coffee pot back on the stove and went to the window. She stared out at the snowy world.

"Bill saw the phantom buck once."

"I know," Robinson said. He wished she wouldn't talk about it. She was getting herself all excited. "Probably Bill had been drinking some of that snake bite medicine."

Mrs. Boody shook her head.

"Bill don't touch a drop." Her face was very red, maybe from the stove. "Bill said the buck was the biggest deer he'd ever seen. He went right by Bill, and disappeared, right in broad daylight. Bill looked for tracks after he was gone, and there weren't any."

She wet her lips and went back to the stove.

"I wouldn't worry, Mrs. Boody," Robinson said.

She looked up then with frantic eyes.

"*It isn't Bill, out there on the road, dead?*"

He went swiftly to her and put one hand on her shoulder.

"I wouldn't lie to you. It wasn't him."

She seemed to relax for the first time since last night.

"I guess you're telling the truth. I wish Bill would come home, though. They used to say that anyone who saw the phantom buck was getting ready for an early death."

NORM Boody came up from the barn with two steaming pails of milk. Roy Starr was getting dressed in the kitchen, close to the stove. He was muttering threats against his brother, Glenn.

"Never let a guy sleep," he groaned. "Always the first guy up and the only man on earth who can't let other people stay in bed when they want to."

Glenn Starr and Marjorie were already at the breakfast table. The others drifted in and sat down. A girl and a husky, sleepy-eyed man came down from upstairs. Roy Starr greeted the girl by chasing her around the stove and left her alone only after she picked up the poker and threatened to use it on him.

Robinson introduced the fifth member of the hunting party at the break-

fast table.

"Pete Larson hasn't hunted before," he said. "Pete, you know our own bunch. You know Norm and Mrs. Boody now. The tall, fair damsel holding the coffee pot is Norma, Mrs. Boody's best assistant housekeeper and daughter. The sleepy eyed creature at her side is her husband, Floyd."

Larson himself was heavy set, and a slightly ponderous man who wore light rimmed glasses and a rather awed look on his face.

"I guess I've let myself in for some rugged country and some heavy eating," he said. "Anyhow, I always did like a fifth cup of coffee and the supply looks adequate."

"It was rugged last night, all right," Roy Starr said.

Instantly there was silence. Norma, the tall, slim girl, looked at her mother questioningly.

Robinson broke in before she had time to speak.

"We found a dead man on the road last night. Nobody we knew."

He heard Norma and her husband catch their breaths quickly. Then the telephone rang and he was on his feet. Norm Boody was closer to the phone and answered it. The remainder of the group went on eating, but every ear was tuned to the conversation.

"Yes?"

He listened for a time, then said:

"I got a party of hunters who came in last night. They saw him on the road. We tried to call you but the wires were dead."

Then:

"Oh? So that was it. Okay, we'll keep an eye open. Haven't seen Bill, have you? He's coming in behind the plough? Good. We were worried about him."

"Telephone linemen came through this morning," he explained. "They

picked up the body. That was Sheriff Walt Beardsly calling. He ain't blaming you boys. Says your tracks went right around the body. Says a bear must have mauled the guy. They found his gun in the ditch."

Earl Robinson said:

"Yea, that's what happened all right. Bill's okay, isn't he?"

Boody nodded.

"Spent the night at the sheriff's house. Couldn't drive in. He's coming in a couple of hours."

Mrs. Boody went out for some more coffee. Larson, managing a smile, said:

"Guess we can go hunting without worrying about anything — except bear."

Norma tickled her husband between well padded ribs.

"Take Floyd along. He'll chase all the bears to the other side of the mountain."

Floyd grinned.

"Guess you boys can take care of yourselves."

Roy Starr hadn't taken an active part in the conversation for some time. He brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"To hell with the phantom," he stood up. "Ten minutes ago you were all tied up inside with a damned silly superstition. Now you're kidding yourselves that everything is okay. You're *still* ready to believe in ghosts and goblins at a moment's notice. What's the matter? We all too scared to think clearly for ourselves?"

Robinson got up.

"Come on, Roy," he said. "Let's go out and get chains on the car. We'll need them to make that south hill."

Roy Starr was trembling. Something had slipped inside him. Something that made him angry at all of them. Who did they think he was? Could they handle him like a ten year



There was the baleful glint of Hell in the monster eyes

old kid?

"You want to lead Junior outside and give him a lecture," he snapped. "Please don't scare these good people. Well, you can all go to hell. I'm going after a deer. If it turns out to be the phantom buck, I'll get *him*. I'm going alone and I don't need you or the car or anything else. I still got two good feet."

They sat there and watched him go. Robinson sat down a little weakly. They heard Roy pick up his rifle in the kitchen and waited until his footsteps faded beyond the woodshed.

"Well," Robinson said at last, "I guess Junior is on the warpath."

GLENN STARR looked at his watch. He halted in the protection of the evergreen grove and turned his back to the wind. Marjorie Wrenn caught up with him.

"Better rest," Glenn said. "It's after noon."

He found some sandwiches in his pocket and passed her one. The girl's face was very pale.

"The tracks didn't come out of the swamp," she said.

"Forget the tracks," Glenn said gently. "It's been snowing since ten o'clock. They were Roy's tracks all right. The snow drifted in and covered them up. He probably headed for home hours ago."

"I—can't eat, Glenn. Let's go back. Let's try to find the tracks again. I'm scared, Glenn. I'm so scared my teeth are chattering."

Glenn took her rifle.

"Follow me," he said abruptly. "You're all done in. I'll take the shortest route."

The girl took half a dozen faltering steps and sank down into the snow. When he reached her side, she was out cold. He rubbed her wrists and

cheeks until her eyes, full of tears, opened slowly.

"You're gonna be all right," he said, and picked her up in his arms.

Slowly, for he knew it was going to be a rough trail, he headed across the valley toward home.

Earl Robinson moved more slowly now. He and Larson had swung down from the north and crossed the three sets of tracks. Larson, puffing from his first day of marching, came behind him. Robinson stopped finally. He waited for Larson to catch up. He pointed at the almost covered tracks.

"Here's where they missed his trail," he said. "I think we can still follow it if we take our time."

"Look," Larson said abruptly, "you don't believe that phantom buck business, do you?"

Robinson didn't answer. He started away through the swamp, watching for a broken twig here, an almost buried footprint there. It took him two long hours to find the end of the trail. It had started to snow again. The boy was half covered with the drift. A thick growth of cedars had protected him from the full force of the storm. His eyes were wide open and he showed signs of recognizing Robinson as the big man bent over him. He tried to smile, but he couldn't. There was blood around his lips and his jacket was torn open to reveal a deep, bloody gash in his chest.

Robinson built a fire hurriedly and Larson kept the blaze alive with dry logs.

Robinson swore softly as he found bandages in his kit and administered first aid. He swore at the cold, and the snow, and the thing that had done this to the kid.

They carried Roy Starr out that night, and it was close to midnight before they met Norm Boody and the

party who had come in search of them. Mrs. Boody had coffee on the stove when they got in. Robinson, once Roy Starr was warm and fairly safe once more, fell into a chair and slept like a child. An hour later, he was on his feet again, staggering, half dead from exhaustion, giving orders to the doctor who had come from Indian River.

ROY spoke in a whisper.

"Earl?"

He was in pain. Bad pain. Earl took his hand.

"It's okay, kid. I'm with you. It's all over."

"Earl," the voice was a sob. "Earl, it's true about the phantom. I saw him."

"I know," Robinson said softly. "Keep quiet. We found you in the swamp. Larson and I brought you in. The Doc says you're okay. Few days rest."

Roy felt all choked up and hot inside. He squeezed Earl's hand.

"Tell Larson he's okay. You're okay. Earl, we got to get out'a here."

His fever was rising.

"Listen, junior," Robinson said sternly, "I said everything's okay, and it is. Lay still and sleep."

Roy wasn't hearing him now. He tried to force himself up on one elbow. His eyes were filled with memories—of terror.

"I was a sap, Earl. I tell you I saw him. He was big and beautiful, big as a nightmare. He snorted right close to me and there was fire shooting out of his nostrils. He hit me like lightning, Earl. I—don't remember—after—that."

He sank back, breathing hard.

Glenn Starr came in from the bedroom.

"How's Roy?"

"He's going to sleep now, aren't you

Roy?" Earl asked.

"Yea—I'm gonna sleep."

"I can't sleep," Glenn Starr said. "If we'd kept him here this morning, he'd have been all right."

"Is Bill up?" Earl asked.

"Yea! He's talking with the Doc in the kitchen. Doctor hasn't left yet."

"Send in Bill and tell Doc to wait a little while," Robinson said grimly.

Bill Boody came into the darkened room and sat down quietly by the couch.

"How's Roy?"

"Okay, Bill," Robinson said. "I been doing some thinking."

"About what?"

Bill Boody was tall, slim, and well put together. His face, burned dark from sun and rain, was sensitive and mirrored friendliness and intelligence.

"About the phantom buck," Robinson said.

"We all have," Boody said. "Norm told you I saw the phantom once, didn't he?"

Robinson nodded.

"Why didn't the phantom attack you, Bill?"

Boody shook his head.

"I don't know. It was the phantom all right. He was big—and grand, like sort of a God."

Neither of them said anything for a while. Roy was sleeping. His breathing came easier now.

"I guess I sound a little corny," Boody said. "I don't mean to."

"No," Robinson answered. "No, I wasn't thinking of that. Roy says it was the phantom that attacked him. He felt kinda like you do about it."

Robinson stood up and walked to the window. He stared upward toward the dark, moonlit forest.

"When did you see the phantom?"

Bill looked thoughtful.

"It was just before dusk . . ."

"I guess I'm not making my question clear," Robinson interrupted. "I mean, was it during hunting season?"

"It was last spring. We were plowing the north field."

"Were you carrying a gun?"

"No," Boody said, puzzled.

"That's what I thought."

Doctor Peterson was a frosty looking old chap with black rimmed specs and a grey beard.

"You about ready to go back to town, Doc?" Robinson asked.

Peterson grinned.

"After I drink all the coffee in sight," he said. "And it looks like I have."

Mrs. Boody was with them in the kitchen. The house was quiet.

"I've got to get gas and oil. Guess I follow you in," Robinson said.

"Good. The boy's all right. I'll be out again tomorrow. Ready to go?"

Outside the snow had finally stopped falling. The early morning was clear, with a promise of a bright day to come. Robinson started his car and warmed it up. The Doctor said good night to Mrs. Boody and came out to climb into his Model T. Robinson backed out slowly and followed the car down the road toward Indian River.

IT WAS just daylight. Robinson left the car a mile from Rosewood and entered the woods. He had taken his time in town, found an all-night gas station to refuel his car and parked it here just as the sun came up, coloring the frosty, blue-gray hills above him.

Half a mile from the road he turned and entered the swamp where he had found Roy the day before. He started walking swiftly. He was weaponless, having left the rifle in his car. Two hours passed and he had penetrated deeply into the swamp.

He was cold. He had seen no fresh

trails. A black squirrel chattered at him, and hid itself on the far side of a cedar tree. A fox hurried across his trail, a red blurr against the snow.

Far away, he heard the sudden dry "snap" of a twig. He found a stump and seated himself. He was very quiet. Suddenly an icy coldness penetrated his entire body. It wasn't the wind or the natural cold that troubled him now. It was the feeling of death—sudden death—poised only seconds away.

Death—behind him, and he dared not look around.

He waited perhaps sixty seconds, and they seemed like hours. He stood up very slowly and started to move his arms rhythmically in a back and forth motion as though to restore circulation. At the same time, he made it evident to anyone—*anything*, looking at him, that he carried no weapon.

Then, without betraying fear, he turned.

Not ten feet away, poised with every splendid muscle tense and alert, was the biggest buck he had ever seen. The great animal stared at him without fear. Its antlers were held high.

The eyes frightened Robinson. They weren't soft, brown deer eyes. They were, instead, black and beady, like twin windows to Hell.

The head swung back. The hooves pawed at the snow. With a snort, the creature sprang into the air. Robinson ducked quickly to one side, but there was no reason for him to flee. The phantom buck, for he was sure the animal was a phantom, moved past him with incredible speed and was gone in the forest. He was aware of a terrific burst of speed—of a perfectly proportioned body, and that was all.

For a long time, Robinson stood there by the stump. All the education that goes into a man, to bring him culture, was reviewing itself in his mind.

All the hunter instinct drained out of him. There was only humbleness left, and respect for wild things.

He knew he would find no tracks, even though he forced himself to look for them. Six inches of untouched snow covered the spot where the phantom had stood.

Robinson shrugged and started back along the lengthy, circular trail to his car.

Norm Boody came out of the house with Roy Starr's rifle. They were all gathered beside the car. Roy, a trifle pale, was wrapped snugly, and resting on the rear seat. Glenn Starr sat beside Roy, his arm about Marjorie. Norma smiled at Glenn.

"I know a secret," she said.

"Better not tell it," Glenn made a pass at her with his open palm. Norma stepped back and laughed loudly.

"Glenn's a hero. He carried Marge out of the cruel woods. He carried her three miles, and now she's consented to marry him."

Glenn gave a war-whoop and started after her. Norma ran into the house and slammed the door.

"You may as well face it," Robinson said. "Roy isn't so weak that he can't kid the daylights out of you all the way home."

Pete Larson spoke from the far corner of the front seat.

HOW about the little secret you're keeping, Earl. That was quite a little research trip you took into the woods this morning."

Robinson looked startled.

"You didn't . . ."

Larson chuckled.

"When you and the doctor left last night, I was suspicious. I went down the road this morning and located your car. I took along a gun for protection. Spent an hour in the swamp. Got tired

of tracking you after that."

Norm Boody had been studying them curiously.

"Bill said you were asking a lot of questions last night, Earl."

Larson spoke again before Robinson could answer.

"Of course we all go at things a little differently," he admitted. "However, I got an idea that the phantom wouldn't attack a man who didn't carry a gun. Earl left his in the car when he went into the swamp."

Robinson nodded.

"I went into the swamp," he admitted. "I had an idea the phantom might be sort of a ghostly protector of the herd. We have quite a slaughter of deer up here every fall. It must be hard on them if they have any feeling at all. What's so damn much different between men killing deer, or a deer killing a man? If the Phantom exists, he's sort of a protecting angel—or a God. If I had met him . . .?"

"You didn't?" Norm Boody asked sharply.

Earl grinned.

"If I *had* met him," he went on, "I guess I'd do something about it. I guess I'd think he was a pretty grand old guy, standing up to fight for his kind. I'd probably look him over and pray for mercy, and get the hell out of his domain. If I hunted again next year, I'd either find new territory, or prepare to get myself killed."

Norm Boody looked solemn.

"Well, I ain't much for hunting myself," he admitted. "But if I *did* like to hunt, and I *believed* a story like that, I'd leave my gun at home when I went into the woods. Ain't that the general idea?"

Roy Starr said weakly:

"Gosh, I'm getting awfully weak already. How about a shot of snake-bite medicine?"

Glenn found a half bottle and passed it around.

"Might as well finish it. My wife-to-be says I gotta stop drinking as soon as we're married."

"And where are *you* hunting next year, Larson," Robinson asked.

Larson grinned.

"How about a good week hunting jack-rabbits? I don't think I'd be very scared if I met the God of the jack-rabbits, even if he did shoot fire out of the corner of his nostrils."

THE END

UNTAPPED POWER

By Charles Reeves

ONE of the biggest problems that the scientists of the future have to face is that of our dwindling power supply. Atomic energy is one of the answers to the question, but usable commercial atomic power is many years away, according to the blueprints of scientists. Our oil supply is running out at an alarming rate as is witnessed by our frantic search for oil over the face of the earth. I have already reported on man's effort to tap oil from the great shale deposits of the United States in a past issue of AMAZING STORIES. Coal supplies are not only growing shorter but much harder to get at, thus driving the price up.

As the result of all of these growing shortages in the prevailing methods of power, government engineers and scientists have been exploring all other known and unknown energy sources. One of the oldest ideas for obtaining heat and power is that of the vertical shaft toward the center of the earth. If this method is used, depths will be reached that now seem fantastic, but the results are also fantastic. In a diamond mine in South Africa, circulating air becomes so hot at only 7000 feet that it could supply 3000 horsepower if harnessed. Sir Charles Parsons, the inventor of the steam turbine, once advanced the plan of sinking a shaft to the depth of 12 miles. Amazing? Yes, but if it could be done, such a shaft would furnish all the energy necessary to a country the size of the United States.

A much more feasible plan of harnessing new power has been suggested, however, that of using the tides. At various places on the surface of the earth, the moon causes a difference of as much as 60 feet between high and low tide. At the

mouth of the Severn river the sea rises an average of 28 feet with an area of over forty square miles acted upon. Then there are the 60 foot tides at the Bay of Fundy. The idea behind the tidal power is to let the moon do the work of raising the water, trap it in some form of reservoir so that it can run down hill when the tide is out, thus generating electricity.

In an even more practical and yet more mystifying manner, Georges Claude, a French engineer and chemist, has already set up a power plant that operates on the difference of temperature between the water at the top of the ocean and the bottom. Claude built this plant in Cuba, because there he found two extreme temperatures. The surface temperature measured 79 to 86 degrees, and at 2000 below sea level, the water registered around 39 degrees. Working on the principle that boiling points are determined by atmospheric pressure, Claude took water from the top of the ocean, put it under a vacuum pump, and pumped enough air out to make the 86 degree water boil. The steam generated by this boiling water was then passed to a condenser where it was cooled by sea water from a depth of 2000 feet. From this point the steam acted as though in a regular turbine, turning the blades and driving a dynamo. After the contraption was once in motion, the starting vacuum pump was turned off.

These are only several of the many plans for harnessing untapped power that have been advanced. All plans, no matter how wild, should be listened to. A fortune waits for the man who comes up with the first feasible idea.

THE END

THE MYSTERIOUS COLCHICINE

By A. Morris

HAVE you ever wished that you could have your own orchard or garden filled with trees or plants each of a standard variety and each producing exactly the same number and kind of fruit? Have you ever won-

dered why bad luck made some of your trees grow stunted and fruitless while others were strong and fertile? With the new drug colchicine now being tested by the United States Department of Agriculture it may soon be possible

to take all the guess work out of things that grow and produce row after row of identical plants or trees.

This amazing drug, found in the root of the autumn crocus, was discovered in 1937, and since then has been the subject of endless experiment with uncanny results. There is no hit and miss method used in testing this drug; the actual workings are known to the scientists, and are explained like this: Colchicine doubles the number of chromosomes in a cell and this double chromosome then becomes hereditary.

The potential importance of this is incredible. For many decades planters have been crossing one sort of strain with another. The offspring of this crossing may be much better in all ways, but unfortunately is sterile and every single plant must be produced as the result of crossbreeding, as they cannot reproduce themselves. The reason for this is that the chromosomes from separate plants are incompatible and will not mate with each other. When treated with colchicine the hybrids become fertile as the chromosomes are double instead of single, thereby providing each chromosome with a mate. This pure strain can be developed without the usual crossing and re-

crossing and in much shorter time. With this treatment identical plants can be grown by the acre. This new method is not just useful in plants, but may be applied to trees with the same result. Forests that formerly took centuries to develop can now be grown in a much shorter time.

The potential economic value of this process is also enormous. Fruits and vegetables can be doubled in size and then grown that way from then on. Various waste parts of vegetables can be grown out and a new strain developed that will be all-useful. Flowers will be double in size and fragrance. A certain type of wood that grows fast can be crossed with a type of wood that is in demand and entire areas may be reforested.

All of these experiments are of interest to us in a vague sort of way, but perhaps the most striking thing about colchicine is that it may be applicable to humans. Even now experiments are being made with animal tissue. The results are not as clearcut as when used with plants, but advances are being registered that may change the course of human growth.

THE END

SCIENCE DISCOVERS SPRING FEVER

By Carter T. Wainwright

THE weather then is much more influential in our daily living than we had hitherto suspected. Feelings of depression and moods of sadness or elation are greatly dependent on the weather. As yet, no great amount of statistical work has been done on the subject so it is impossible to give an exact relationship between these things. We merely know that they exist.

Sometimes cool weather for example with gray depressive days may be a stimulant to do greater work. For a person not working, it may drive him to suicide or illness. Therefore it is apparent that no simple predictions can be made as to the effects weather will have on a given personality—at least, not yet. But the wonderful thing about it all, is that the condition is recognized as existing while previously it had not been.

Along with this announcement has come another perhaps of equal importance. The malaria virus has been isolated! Scientists have been trying to locate this devil for the longest time. The war has shown what a dreadful chronic disease it is as well as a killer.

The main difficulty has been up to now, the location of the parasite in the human body. Where does the creature take refuge? We know that the mosquito is the agent who carries the little beastie, but where does it find its place in the human body?

The scientist who isolated it, did so very logically. He repeatedly inoculated monkeys with the greatest concentrations of the germ that he

could get, by exposing them to the bites of innumerable infected mosquitoes. Then he proceeded to take the monkeys part, bone by bone, organ by organ. Finally after an exhausting and detailed search he hit upon the organ where the virus established itself—the liver!

With this knowledge, it is only going to be a matter of time until some really effective way—besides quinine and the artificial substitutes—to eliminate it, are discovered.

The whole problem is a nice illustration of the effectiveness of concentrated research by one scientist. Ever since the building of the Panama Canal when the disease of malaria became so well known, laboratories have been working to isolate the monster. This has been for more than forty years. And without success. Now, at long last, a lone researcher has hit on it!

This is an example of rare shape these days. Everyone is accustomed to vast laboratories and huge expenditures for the beating of any medical killer—for example, cancer. And that is the way a scientific discovery is usually made. But occasionally, as in this case, the single worker is able to make an earth-shaking discovery. Apparently there is no substitute for skill and brains, not even billions of dollars and hundreds of laboratories.

This is not so say that such large-scale attacks should not be made. Far from it. By all means such great concentrations of labor and money should be used on any of the human killers. And as long as there are scientists, they will be made!



Draat

Hers was the beauty famous across half a world

The RETURN of THARN

By HOWARD BROWNE

3-PART SERIAL—PART 2

Continuing the adventures of Tharn, Warrior of the Dawn, as he battles his way across a world to rescue the lovely Dylara, his beloved mate.

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

WHEN Trakor, seventeen-year-old member of the tribe of Gerdak, set out to prove his prowess as a hunter to impress the lovely Lanoa, he did not bargain with mighty Sadu, the lion. Trapped by the beast, his startled eyes beheld a jungle god leap from the trees, flint knife in hand.

Tharn, the Cro-Magnon, had been on his way across a trackless waste to rescue his beloved Dylara, who had been captured by the men of Ammad, a city far away. Now he halted to slay Sadu and save a youngster's life.

Leaping upon Sadu's back, Tharn plunged the knife again and again into the beast's heart until it fell dead. Then, across the body, two men stared at each other and a new friendship was born.

Taking up the trail, which led toward Trakor's caves, the two went on together, and as they went, Tharn told Trakor his story: of how Jotan, the Ammadian, had come from a city far to the south and kidnapped Dylara, and how he, Tharn, was now on his way to save her or die in the attempt. Excitedly Trakor told of a war party one of his fellow-tribesmen had seen, obviously that of Jotan. Tharn knew now that he was on the right trail!

Arriving at Gerdak's camp, death threatens Tharn since he is a stranger. Trakor calls him friend, but Gerdak beats Trakor into insensibility. Tharn, leaping upon Gerdak, shakes him unconscious, and then, the whole tribe in pursuit, snatches up Trakor's unconscious form and flees with him into the trees.

Now that Trakor is an outcast from his tribe there is no alternative but to join Tharn in his search. But Tharn must learn from Roban, the warrior of Gerdak who saw the Jotan war party, the direction taken. So they must return to the tribe of Gerdak.

Arriving at the caves, Trakor tells Tharn where Roban sleeps. In the night Tharn steals into the camp of the tribe, searching for the man who can tell him where Dylara is being taken by her captors.

Tharn reaches the sleeping Roban, but as he seeks to carry him from the cave, having rendered him unconscious, a hand closes on his ankle.

Meanwhile, far away, the war party of the Ammadians is encamped, their camp surrounded by a palisade, and a fire is alight to keep away Sadu, the lion. Sadu is stalking the camp, and his voice is heard by the inmates, a band of warriors including two girls and

three nobles: Alurna, princess of Ammad, Dylara, Tharn's beloved, Javan, Tamar and Jotan, warriors of Ammad.

Jotan is in love with Dylara but smarts beneath the jibes of his fellow tribesmen. Tamar, at the moment, is ridiculing him, mentioning that the giant Tharn would face Sadu without fear, were he present.

Dylara says this is true, and that if Tharn were there, he would kill them all with ease. Jotan asks Dylara if she would go off with Tharn, were he to appear.

Dylara says she would, whereupon Alurna tells her of the magnificence of Ammad, to which she is going, and compares it with the horrors of jungle life among the beasts. "A few days there, and you will forget your savage lover," she says.

Dylara shakes her head, says she knows she is being taken there as a slave, and not as a guest, and that for her life there would be intolerable. She says she will escape if given the opportunity.

Jotan declares that this is false, that when she arrives at Ammad, it will be to go before the high priest of the God-Whose-Name - May - Not-Be - Spoken-Aloud and be declared his mate.

This statement causes Alurna much grief, for she loves Jotan, and has long ago been promised that he is hers.

Alurna decided that Dylara must die, and she has plans for her death in Ammad.

Several more lions join the one which crouches just beyond the circle of fire, and, made bolder by numbers, one of them stalks into the firelight.

It becomes evident that the lions mean to attack, and fear descends upon the little encampment.

Jotan calls his men, who, in an attempt to scare the lions away, throw firebrands over the weak palisade. One

of the brands strikes a lion on the flank, and in a moment, maddened by the pain, Sadu wheels and hurls his gigantic body over the flames and directly into the middle of the camp.

All of the lions attack now, and many Ammadians are being slain. Sadu leaps through the air toward Alurna, who is paralyzed by fear—but out of the darkness leaps a figure, knife in hand, and Sadu dies. It is an Ammadian named Jaton. Dylara, finding herself unguarded, flees through a break in the palisade, but is pursued by another lion.

She disappears into the darkness, and as the last of the lions are fought off, there is no sign of her. Jotan is much shaken, but after a search, he is convinced that Dylara has not been killed by the lions, that she has escaped and is even now on her way back to the caves of Majok, her father.

He realizes now, too, that there is another complication. He cannot go back to Ammad having spurned the love of Alurna. Jaltor, monarch of Ammad, is a personal friend of Jotan's own father. He can well imagine Jaltor's reaction upon learning that Alurna had been spurned in favor of a half-wild woman of the caves!

Jotan is faced with a decision. What shall he do? Should he humble himself before Alurna and all the warriors present in the camp, or should he stand by his rash statement? . . .

He rose stiffly from where he sat among his friends, conscious from their expressions that they knew he had arrived at a decision affecting them all.

"When dawn comes," he said in a strangely toneless voice, "we break camp and continue on toward Ammad. Not all of us will go on, however. A few warriors shall accompany me in search of Dylara . . . and I shall not return without her!"

(Now go on with the story.)

CHAPTER IV
THE SEEDS OF TREACHERY



OTAR, a warrior in the service of Vokal, a powerful and high-ranking nobleman of the city of Ammad, was violently unhappy this night. His sandaled feet beat an angry rhythm against the pavement in front of the arched opening in the high stone wall about his master's estate. Thirty paces one way, an about face executed with the military precision Vokal demanded of his guards, then thirty paces back again, spear held rigidly across his tunic-clad chest.

The velvety blackness of a moonless night weighted the street and matched his mood—a blackness only intensified by the feeble yellow rays of a lantern in a niche above the gate. Silently he cursed the captain of the guards who had demoted him to night sentry duty, then he cursed Vokal for his mad judgment in picking so heartless a captain to begin with.

There was a sound reason for Otar's unhappiness. Only the day before he had taken a mate—the incomparable Marua, daughter of one of Vokal's

understewards—Marua, whose exquisite blonde beauty and matchless form had brought her a host of male admirers, many of them in high positions in Vokal's service. Among them was Ekbar, captain of the nobleman's guards; and therein, Otar knew, lay the reason why he was walking a midnight post outside Vokal's sprawling estate. The thought of his lovely new mate alone in his snug apartment in the guard's quarters while he paced away the hours brought a fresh flood of curses to his lips.

"Greetings," said a hoarse whispering voice behind him.

Otar, startled, whirled and leveled his spear in one rapid motion. "Who speaks?" he growled.

An indistinct figure, muffled to the chin in a black cloak, was standing in the street only a foot or two beyond reach of the questing spear-head.

"Fear not," said the harsh voice. "It is I—Heglar, nobleman of Ammad. I am here to hold an audience with the noble Vokal. At his own invitation. Here" He held out his hand from under the cloak and something gleamed from the center of his palm in the faint light. "Examine this by the rays from yonder lantern."

Cautiously, his heavy spear ready in his right hand, Otar took the object and backed away until he could see it clearly. His careful maneuvering was in line with orders, for attempts at assassination were fairly common among Ammad's nobles in their ceaseless efforts for power second only to Jaltor himself, king of all Ammad.

A single glance was all Otar needed. It was Vokal's personal talisman: a small square of gold bearing on one side a peculiar design cut in the soft metal. No humblest warrior in all

Vokal's vast retinue who did not know that design and his duties when faced with it.

He returned the talisman to the man who called himself Heglar and stepped back, bringing his spear sharply to a saluting position. "You may pass, noble Heglar. This path will bring you to a side door of Vokal's palace. The guard there will see to it that you are taken to him."

VOKAL stood on a small balcony of stone outside his private apartment on the fourth level of his huge, many-roomed palace. He was a tall slender graceful man in his early fifties, with a narrow face, small cameo-sharp features and a languid almost dreamy quality in his movements and expression. Prematurely gray hair waved back from a brow of classical perfection, and the hand he lifted to smooth that hair was narrow and long fingered and beautifully kept. He was wearing the knee-length tunic common to all men and women of Ammad, but his was of a better weave, its belt of the same material was a full two inches wider and trimmed with the purple of Ammadian royalty.

From this elevated position he was able to look out over the northern section of the city of Ammad—a vast orderly array of box-like stone buildings, some gray and some white, rising one to three floors above the streets. Fully five miles from where Vokal stood was the northern section of the great gray wall of stone encircling the city, and the buildings became smaller and simpler in design the nearer they were to that wall.

A man's position in Ammad was determined by how near the city's center his dwelling stood. At the metropolis' exact center was the mammoth palace of Jaltor, king of Ammad and supreme ruler of a vast country of jungle, plain and mountain extending a moon's march in all directions. Like Vokal's own palace, Jaltor's

rose from the crest of one of the city's five hills; but the king's, in addition to being at the exact center of Ammad, stood on the highest of them all. It could be seen from the windows on the opposite side of Vokal's palace—the principal reason his personal quarters were here. Sight of that huge sprawling pile of white stone, its roof six levels above the ground, was a constant source of irritation to him.

A sound of soft knocking from behind him aroused Vokal from his reverie, and he turned unhurriedly and re-entered the room.

The knocking was repeated. Vokal sank gracefully into an easy chair covered with the soft pelt of Tarlok, the leopard, crossed his shapely bare legs and studied the effect with approval.

Again the sound of knocking, a shade louder this time. "Enter," called Vokal around a yawn which he covered with the tips of two fingers.

A door opened, revealing the rigidly erect figure and carefully expressionless visage of an officer of the palace guard.

Vokal concluded his yawn. "Yes, Bartan?"

"The noble Heglar is here, Most-High."

"Excellent! Permit him to enter immediately."

The guard executed a sharp quarter turn and stepped back, allowing a man swathed to the chin in the voluminous folds of a black cloak to push past him into the room.

"Greetings, noble Vokal." The words came out in a hoarse croak that grated against the host's sensitive ears.

"Greetings, noble Heglar." Vokal's smile seemed even dreamier than usual. "Remove your cloak, please, and be seated . . . Bartan, tell a slave to bring us wine."

"At once, Most-High." The guard withdrew, closing the door softly.

Vokal's gray-blue eyes went to his

guest and he smiled blandly. "I trust all is well with you and the members of your family, noble Heglar."

STRIPPED of his cloak, Heglar was revealed as a man of extraordinary thinness and considerable age. The pronounced hollows in his cheeks and a thin nose the dimensions of an eagle's beak, together with the rocky ridge of an underslung jaw, gave him an emaciated look. But his body was straight as a young sapling, his shoulders for all their boniness were surprisingly broad, and his light blue eyes were alert and piercing.

He ignored his host's solicitous inquiry concerning his family and bent and unknotted the thongs of his heelless sandals. Kicking them off he leaned back in his chair and, sighing with relief, placed his bare feet on a low stool in front of him.

If he caught the faint wrinkle of disgust about Vokal's shapely lips he ignored it. "You'll forgive an old man for humoring his feet," he croaked. "I'm not accustomed to long walks these days."

"By all means give them comfort."

"I tried to learn from your messenger the reason behind your asking me here tonight. He would tell me nothing—simply gave me your message, handed me your emblem piece—" he dug a hand into a pocket of the tunic, took out the square of gold and handed it to Vokal—"and left without another word."

"You could hardly expect one of my men to do otherwise," Vokal said frostily.

"One never knows." The old man settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "I was curious and a little doubtful at the interest of the third most powerful man in all Ammad—especially when his interest concerns the most impoverished and least influential noble of that same country."

There was a soft knock at the door and a slave girl slipped in, placed a tray of wine and two goblets on a low

table between the two men, and went out as silently as she had entered.

Heglar's eyes followed her trim figure until the gently closing door shut off his view. "Believe me," he said, watching Vokal fill the two goblets, "there was a day I had slaves like that one. Many slaves—and more warriors than any noble in all Ammad. Only old Rokkor himself, Jalutor's father, had more of them."

He sighed gustily. "But that's all in the past now. My only regret is that I must leave my young mate and our two children with little more than a roof above their heads when I die."

"Your love for the gracious and beautiful Rhoa is well known throughout all Ammad," Vokal murmured, handing his guest one of the filled goblets.

The old man gulped a third of its contents before taking the container from his lips. "And why shouldn't I love her?" he demanded harshly. "Thirty summers my junior, lovely enough to have her pick of men—and she chooses me. Forty summers I spent with my first woman—and what a sour-faced old hyena *she* was—and not a child to show for it. Now we have two, Rhoa and I—and I have nothing to leave them but a miserable hovel in place of the palace I once owned."

Vokal sipped daintily from his goblet and let the garrulous old man ramble on. Let him go on bemoaning his lowly position and living over his past glories. Every word of it would make the old one more agreeable to Vokal's proposition.

The nostalgic refrain went on until Heglar had emptied his first glass of wine and extended it for a second helping. This time he spilled a few drops on the floor as a voluntary offering to the God-Whose-Name-May Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud—a tribute given usually only during formal dinners—gulped down several swallows of the alcoholic grape beverage, then turned those sharp eyes on Vokal.

"But," he said hoarsely, "you didn't ask me here to talk of the old days. What do you want of me, noble Vokal?"

THERE was a short period of silence during which Vokal appeared to be making up his mind. Wavering light from candles set in wall brackets about the long, richly furnished room gave a lean, almost vulpine cast to his calm face and a glittering sparkle to his cold eyes. Finally he said:

"I want to make you a wealthy man again, Heglar."

The hand holding the wine goblet jerked involuntarily and some of the wrinkles in the aged face seemed to deepen. ". . . Why me?"

Vokal smiled dreamily. "Right to the point, eh, Heglar? It is one of my reasons for selecting you."

"Hmm." The old one looked down into his half-empty goblet to hide the sudden gleam in his eyes. "Tell me more of these reasons for wishing to make me rich."

"The list is long," Vokal said graciously, "so I shall give only the principal ones. First, it is well known throughout all Ammad that you are a man of your word—that once you give a pledge nothing in this world or the next could force you to go back on your word."

Heglar scowled. "One of the reasons I am a poor man today!"

"Secondly," Vokal went on, "it is reported that you are a walking dead man, that you have only a few moons left to live because of the sickness in your throat." At the other's startled expression he waved a languid hand. "It is common knowledge, noble Heglar; your physician is a talkative man."

"Thirdly," he continued, his voice calm, almost indifferent, "your long and honorable career as a mighty warrior proves you a man of great physical courage, and you are still strong and active enough for a dangerous task."

A wry smile touched the old man's lips. "Then I am expected to earn this wealth you are offering me?"

"Of course. I am not noted for being a charitable man, noble Heglar."

". . . Are there other reasons?"

"Lastly," Vokal said imperturbably, "as a nobleman you have the freedom of Jaltor's court and may come and go there as you please."

He looked sharply at the older man as he finished speaking and for a long moment they stared into each other's eyes in silence.

Heglar was the first to speak. "Now that you have listed my qualifications, what use do you expect to put them to?"

Vokal bent forward and fixed him with his penetrating gaze. "I must call upon the first of them before this conversation can go any further. Will you give me your solemn pledge that not one word of this will go beyond the two of us?"

". . . Yes."

"Good. I want you to forfeit the few remaining moons of life left to you."

Heglar blinked. It was the sole sign of emotion aroused by that startling declaration. "Those few moons are priceless to me, noble Vokal," he said, a faint smile hovering about his lips.

"I am prepared to pay heavily for them."

"You would have to . . . What do you want me to do?"

Vokal leaned back in his chair and placed the tips of his fingers lightly together, looking over them at the old man. His eyes had gone back to being dreamy again. He said:

"I want you to attempt the assassination of Jaltor, king of Ammad!"

The breath left Heglar's lungs in an explosive gasp. "What madness is this!" he cried hoarsely. "Why do you want Jaltor dead? Certainly his death would not better your position as a noble in the court. His son would take the throne; and even if something happened to him, his sister would be

next in line. Are you planning to do away with the entire royal family, noble Vokal?"

Vokal was shaking his head. "I'm afraid you did not understand me, my friend. I said that I wanted you to attempt Jaltor's assassination—not to kill him."

"This makes no sense to me!"

"It is very simple. I want you to attend one of Jaltor's morning audiences within the next day or two. Work your way close to him, draw a knife and make a clumsy attempt to stab him. But be sure you fail. The guards will overpower you instantly; and when Jaltor demands to know why you tried to kill him, refuse to answer other than to hint that you were not alone in the plot."

"Knowing Jaltor as we both do, he will order you put to torture in an effort to learn the facts. Endure that torture as long as you possibly can. Then blurt out the name of the man who hired you."

Heglar was watching him through narrowed eyes. "I'm beginning to see the light," he said dourly. "The name I give him will be that of the man you are really after."

"Exactly."

"Whereupon I will be put to death."

"Jaltor has never been famed for his leniency, noble Heglar."

THE old man drained his goblet of wine and put it on the table with a steady hand. "At least he is a just man. He would punish only those he believed implicated in the plot; my family would not be persecuted." He seemed to be speaking to himself. "Rhoa would be a wealthy woman and my children would never know want or hardship . . ."

His eyes came slowly up to Vokal. "My price will be one thousand tals!"

It was a staggering amount—the equivalent of twelve thousand young male slaves—but Vokal never hesitated. "I will pay it, noble Heglar,"

he said quietly.

"In advance."

"As you wish. I need no assurance beyond your word that you will carry out the exact terms of the arrangement."

Heglar sighed. "You have my word . . . What name will Jaltor's torture wring from my reluctant lips?"

"That of the noble Garlud."

"Oho!" Heglar nodded in tribute. "That clears up the picture. Garlud is second only to Jaltor as the most powerful man in all Ammad. With him out of the way, you, as the next in line among Ammad's noblemen, will take Garlud's place and all the benefits that go with it. I congratulate you, noble Vokal, on your shrewdness."

They filled their earthen goblets and drank. After a moment Heglar said, "There is one drawback to your plan, my friend. I hesitate to mention it, for a man as thorough as you has doubtless anticipated that flaw and taken steps to overcome it."

"No man is perfect," Vokal said equably. "To what do you refer?"

"Garlud has a son. As is our custom he will inherit his father's position and estate even though Garlud is executed for treason."

"And if the son is dead also?" Vokal said silkily.

"So you have thought of it! I might have known. In that case, since Garlud's mate died over a moon ago, his wealth returns to the State, except for the palace which is given to the next nobleman in line."

"Precisely."

"Uh-hunh. Do you know for sure that Garlud's son—let's see: his name is . . . ah—"

"Jotan."

"Of course. A fine young man too—as I remember him. You're sure he's dead?"

"If not, he soon will be."

"But he is not in Ammad, I understand. Didn't he make a trip to Sep-

har, Vokal?"

"He is due back within half a moon at the earliest."

"How will you handle the matter when he arrives at Ammad's gates?"

Vokal smiled his dreamy smile. "He will not arrive at Ammad's gates, O Heglar! The day you attempt Jaltor's assassination a party of my most trusted guards will leave Ammad to intercept Jotan and his men. Their orders will be to leave not one of them alive."

"It is clear that you have thought of everything!" The old man gulped down his wine and stood up. "It is late, and at my age I need a great deal of sleep—especially if I am to be tortured by Jaltor's experts in that line! So, if you will pay me my thousand tals, noble Vokal, I shall leave you."

"Of course." Vokal rose smoothly to his feet, went to the door and summoned a guard outside. "Arouse Yodak and instruct him to bring a thousand tals to me here."

"At once, Most-High." The guard saluted and went quickly down the hall.

Heglar was shaking his head admiringly. "You take some long chances, Vokal!"

The gray-haired nobleman glanced sharply at him. "What do you mean?"

"This matter of your guards calling you 'Most-High'. That is a mark of respect given only to kings, you know. I doubt if Jaltor would approve of your appropriating it to your own use."

THE other's blue-gray eyes seemed to film over. "Kings have been known to die, noble Heglar—and at times the ranking nobleman takes his place. One must prepare for every possibility."

"Even to having one's guards form the habit of saying Most-High, eh?"

The arrival of a small, frail-bodied old man in hastily donned tunic ended the conversation. He was bearing a

small cloth bag which gave off the sounds of clinking metal.

"The thousand tals, Most-High," he quavered, holding out the bag.

Vokal took it and dismissed the man. ". . . Would you care to count them?" he said upon placing the bag in Heglar's hands.

"It is not necessary," the old man said, then smiling, added: "You need my specialized services too badly to cheat me!"

Vokal summoned a guard and instructed him to appoint several warriors to escort the old man safely to his home, as robbery under cover of night was far from unusual on Ammad's numerous streets.

When the door had closed and Vokal was alone once more, he returned to his chair and filled his wine cup. "A thousand tals," he mused. "Heglar's assistance comes high indeed. But let him fondle them for a little while before they come back to me—along with the lovely Rhoa. I wonder what the old man would say if he knew his mate has been my mistress these past three moons!"

CHAPTER V BEYOND THE HEIGHTS

AS THARN felt those fingers close about his ankle he dropped instantly to his other knee to keep from being upset and swung his free hand in a sweeping blow at the point where reason told him the face of his attacker would be.

So quickly had he acted that his knuckles thudded home on an unseen jaw before its owner was able to shout an alarm. There followed a convulsive twist of a body in front of him and the clutching fingers loosed their hold.

His unconscious prize still hanging from his shoulders, Tharn regained his feet and raced cat-like for the mouth of the cave. Behind him he caught the sound of a startled grunt, followed by a wild yell that roused

every occupant of the cave while Tharn was still a good thirty feet short of his goal.

A huge form shot up in front of him, a raised knife silhouetted against the star light beyond. Behind him naked feet whispered against rock as several enemy warriors rushed to close with the foolhardy intruder.

Tharn was trapped! Burdened as he was by the limp weight of his captive, he knew his chances of leaving Gerdak's cave were almost nonexistent.

But not once did the thought come to him of abandoning his catch—his only means of locating the route of those who held Dylara. With a single bound he was upon the man in his path; a supple twist of his body allowed the descending knife to slip harmlessly past. At the same instant he drove a hip into his attacker, who, off balance, was knocked headlong into two other warriors.

The way was clear now to the cave's mouth and Tharn was congratulating himself that he would at least reach open air when two more warriors dropped from above onto the narrow ledge of Gerdak's cave. Evidently they had been aroused by the chorus of yells and had come down from their caves to investigate.

At sight of their leveled spears Tharn skidded to a halt. Behind him he could hear at least two of Gerdak's personal guards moving cautiously forward to take him from the rear. With no avenue for retreat, with a pair of trained fighting men cutting off his advance, his chances for escape were thinned indeed.

Yet not for an instant did his confidence waver. He had weathered worse situations, and the muscles and cunning developed by a thousand jungle battles were weapons superior to the flint-headed spears hemming him in.

Even as he came to a halt, his sharp eyes caught a glimpse of that

stack of spears he had passed when first entering the cave. One bronzed arm shot out, circled the lot of those keen-pointed sticks and lifted and flung them in one continuous motion.

The warriors outside were engulfed by the minor avalanche of flint and wood. They stepped back precipitantly, and one of the men was tripped up as a shaft slipped between his legs. With a shrill cry of terror he tottered momentarily on the brink of the ledge, then went over backwards, his despairing scream rising thinly on the night air.

Tharn had not waited to learn the outcome of his ruse. While the remaining warrior was attempting to sidestep the shower of spears the cave lord was upon him. Avoiding the flint point licking out at his naked chest, he ducked and swung his free fist in a savage arc that ended wrist deep in an unprotected belly.

Bent nearly double by the blow, the enemy Cro-Magnard was lifted completely from his feet and propelled into space, his already unconscious body tracing a perfect parabola to death on the ground sixty feet below.

ALTHOUGH no enemy stood before him, Tharn was a long way from safety. A spear thrown from the cave behind him passed scant inches from his head signifying Gerdak's personal guards had recovered their wits and were after him once more. Below him a score of cave mouths were disgorging armed fighting men and flaming torches dotted the cliffside. To attempt to descend by the path that had brought him here was worse than foolhardy.

As in most Cro-Magnon settlements, the chief's own cave was nearest the cliff's top. A glance upward revealed to Tharn the escarpment's top not more than twenty feet distant. To swarm up that almost vertical slope while burdened with a body would have taxed the agility of little

Nobar, the monkey. But there was no other avenue of escape except to battle an entire community—and no time to compute chances for scaling those heights.

Already two warriors, each armed with a stone knife, had gained the ledge on either side of him, grins of triumph curling their lips, while a faint scuffling sound against the cave floor behind him told Tharn others were slinking toward him from the rear.

With a muffled snarl Tharn wheeled and began to climb. His groping fingers and toes found outcroppings of rock to serve as almost invisible rungs of a perilous ladder. A lifetime of climbing, plus utter self-confidence, sent him up that sheer surface with incredible speed.

So completely unexpected was their quarry's route that Gerdak's men were thrown into momentary confusion. By the time the first shower of spears rose toward the climbing cave man he was three-quarters of the way to freedom. As a result most of the weapons fell short of their mark, while the others, because of the uncertain light and the swiftness of their target's progress, missed completely. Immediately a second flight of spears were launched—but time had run out. Tharn was already over the lip of the precipice as they were rising in his direction.

He found himself on rolling, grass-covered ground. A hundred yards ahead was a jungle-cloaked forest, its towering trees close-knit to the point of impenetrability.

With long, loping strides Tharn crossed the ribbon of grassland, melting into the shadows of the overhanging branches as the first of Gerdak's warriors appeared at the cliff's top.

The ground was too choked with verdure for more than snail-like progress, and Tharn, his unconscious burden still draped across one broad shoulder, took to the trees. With a

celerity that long ago had become second nature to him he raced through the branches, moving parallel to the strip of grassland he had crossed a few moments earlier. The shouts of his bewildered pursuers faded, swallowed up finally by the noises peculiar to a nocturnal jungle.

Half an hour later altered his course and returned to the ribbon of open ground. By this time his captive was showing signs of returning consciousness and Tharn tightened his grip on the youth's arm to prevent him from attempting to get away. He could feel tremors of fear course through the flesh pressing against his shoulder and he smiled grimly. A terrified prisoner was usually a tractable one.

At this point the cliffside was neither as steep nor as high as that housing Gerdak's tribe. Tharn went over its edge without hesitation, slipping groundward with the reckless abandon of a falling stone, yet landing there without an appreciable jar.

The forest at this point came almost to the base of the cliff. Tharn entered, swung lightly up to the middle terraces and set out on the return journey to that point opposite Gerdak's caves where he had left Trakor.

While he had still a goodly distance to go he heard the sounds of shouting voices and caught an occasional glimpse of a flaming torch through rifts in the foliage ahead. Evidently Gerdak was not lightly giving up hope of getting his hands on the man who had made fools of him and his warriors.

An unerring instinct developed through years of travel through uncharted terrains brought Tharn to the very tree where he had left his new found friend. But even as he entered its branches his nose told him what his eyes verified.

"Trakor," he called out, keeping his voice down lest some nearby enemy warrior hear it. "Trakor, where are

you?"

There was no answer. Trakor was gone.

EVEN as Sadu left the ground in a final leap aimed at crushing Dylara's fleeing figure to earth, the girl sprang for a low-hanging branch of a jungle giant. As her fingers closed about its rough bark she flung her body to one side, Sadu's cruel talons raking the air scant inches away. Before the beast could turn and leap a second time she was twenty feet above it and climbing with the speed of desperation.

She heard the sound of tearing foliage as the lion sprang blindly into the lower branches, a thump as it toppled back to earth, then an angry roar of protest at being cheated of its prey. She stopped her climb then and leaned her head weakly against the bole, panting and shivering from strain and utter relief.

Below her, Sadu stalked back and forth a time or two, voicing his displeasure. This lasted for no more than a moment or two, however; Sadu was too much of a realist to waste time in bewailing his ill luck. The rumblings of satisfaction from his fellows as they bore their kills into the forest, the screams of dying men, told him there was food aplenty back among the fires.

Dylara caught a glimpse of the brute as it slunk swiftly toward the terrified encampment. She crouched there, watching the awful scenes of carnage while gradually her heart stopped its mad pounding and the trembling left her legs and arms. She knew regret that many of the men she had learned to know and respect were dying so horribly, but the sight of what went on did not affect her beyond that. Except for these last few moons all of her eighteen years had been spent practically cheek by jowl with the jungle and its denizens, the only life she had known. The

fiercest animals had stalked her at times, just as the warriors of her father's tribe had stalked them. She knew first-hand the stinging insects, the loathsome snakes whose bite or coils could bring a lingering death or a quick one. She knew the chill nights of the rainy season, the unbearable heat and humidity at other times. As a result death and suffering were able to touch her deeply only when they affected some one close to her.

It was a kind of life that had its compensations. She was far more self-reliant and much better equipped for survival under her present circumstances than the average Ammadian would have been. Her eyes and ears were more sharply attuned to impending danger, she could climb far better, she knew how to find water where her recent companions would perish of thirst, she could distinguish between poisonous and non-poisonous fruits and roots.

Yet for all of that she was still a girl, young and, by jungle standards, weak. She caught herself wishing Tharn were with her—and even as the thought came she knew a fleeting doubt.

Did she love him? It was a question she was not yet able to answer. The memory of his handsome face and splendid body rose to torment her with doubt. She recalled him as he appeared in Sephar's arena facing insurmountable odds with a laugh and a careless toss of his black-thatched head, remembered his blazing eyes and rippling muscles as he plummeted to earth between her and charging Sadu, appearing just in time to stave in the lion's skull with one terrible blow. In all the jungle, in all the world, there was no man a tenth his equal in cunning, strength and courage! Even among his own kind he was unique; for no man in Cro-Magnon history could use his nose the way the beasts used theirs, no man who could travel among the trees with the rock-

eting agility of little Nobar, the monkey.

If only he had met and wooed and won her instead of seizing her by force and carrying her away like some bit of jungle loot! Pride and the awareness of her position as daughter of a tribal chief could not permit her to surrender to a man who would do such a thing. It was the way the Hairy Men* won their mates, and Dylara, daughter of Majok, must give her heart, not have it taken!

EVEN as she told herself this for the hundredth time, she realized such thoughts were probably empty. The chances were overwhelming that Tharn had not survived the rigors of the Sepharian Games: battles between men and between men and beasts for the entertainment of Sephar's populace and held in honor of the God-Whose-N am e-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud. Jotan and the others had told her many times that no man in all Sephar's history had ever come through those Games alive.

And even if he should! Would he undertake to follow her across the almost limitless stretch of plains, mountains and jungles to the country of Ammad? Even if he should accomplish such a feat—how could he hope to wrest her from the depths of a stronghold as impenetrable as she understood Ammad to be?

No, it was unthinkable. She had best wait until the lions were driven from the encampment below, then slip from her tree and go back to Jo-

tan. Since the day he had won her from Sephar's high priest he had treated her with unfailing courtesy and kindness, declaring over and over his love for her but not once attempting to force his attentions upon her. After a little while she might allow herself to be won over into accepting him as her mate. It would be an honored, sheltered life and in time she might know complete happiness.

Dylara was shaking her head even as these last thoughts were crowding in. No. Her place was with her own kind, with Majok and the others. It was a long, long way back to them and in the attempt she might leave her bones to bleach on some mountain top or disappear down the maw of one of the great cats. But there was no other acceptable choice—and no time like the present to get started.

Carefully she began to work her way into the jungle, moving cautiously far out on a strong limb until she was able to clamber into the branches of the next tree. The curtain of greenery was too thick for the light of moon or stars to penetrate, leaving her to grope her way in utter darkness. Each vine she scraped against was pictured in her mind as the sinuous coils of Sleesa, the snake; each fluttering of a disturbed bird was an aroused panther or leopard.

She was not going on this way much farther; her nerves, steady as they were, could not take much of such suspense. Only deep enough into the jungle to keep the inexperienced Ammadians from following her trail; with the coming of Dytia, the sun, she would locate a game trail pointing in the direction she wished to go, then descend to the ground and follow it.

An hour later her trembling limbs refused to continue this inch-by-inch progress. And so Dylara made her way toward the high flung branches of a forest patriarch to where Jalok, the panther, and Tarlok, the leopard,

*The Hairy Men was the Cro-Magnards' name for Neanderthal Man. The Neanderthalers appeared in Earth's prehistory roughly 100,000 years before the birth of Christ and centered in Southern France and Spain of today. At the time of the Cro-Magnards' arrival, perhaps 80,000 years later, Neanderthal Man was nearly extinct, possibly because of climatic changes due to the recession of the last Ice Age. Cro-Magnon Man, the first of *Homo Sapiens* (true men), regarded these ape-like subhumans as little more than beasts and eventually exterminated them.—Ed.

dare not go. Here the foliage was less compact and Uda's pale beams displayed to her rapt eyes an endless sea of tree tops everywhere about her.

Finding a comfortable fork fully a hundred feet above the jungle floor, Dylara composed herself to wait the coming of dawn. Finally she drifted off to sleep, while far below a lion roared that he had made his kill and filled his belly for the night.

And not long after, a jungle dweller, swinging swiftly through the trees, came to a sudden halt on a swaying branch as a vagrant breeze brought the scent of her to its quivering nostrils. For a full minute it remained motionless as if carved from stone, then it turned sharply aside and went on, fairly flying along the dizzy pathway of swaying boughs, following that scent spoor to its source.

WHILE Tharn was puzzling over the strange disappearance of Trakor, his keen ears caught a sudden yell of surprise from the direction of Gerdak's caves, followed by a chorus of exultant exclamations that told him the Cro-Magnards had flushed some sort of game and had succeeded in bringing it down.

Quickly he lowered his captive to a broad branch, stuffed a handful of leaves into its mouth, bound them there with a short length of vine, then lashed the wrists to the tree bole. This done he was on the point of swinging off to investigate what lay behind those sounds when he caught a glimpse of a familiar object swinging from a neighboring branch.

His blackwood bow and quiver of arrows left earlier with Trakor! With them in their accustomed places along his back and shoulder, Tharn swung the short distance between tree and clearing. From a wide branch he gazed down at the scene below.

A knot of enemy warriors was moving slowly toward the caves of Gerdak, among them the still struggling

figure of Trakor. Wavering flames of resin-wood torches lighted up his features and Tharn saw there was only rage in his expression and nothing of fear. Already shouts from the group had aroused others of the tribe and a score of them were running forward to meet it.

With quick, certain movements of his powerful hands Tharn unshipped his bow and withdrew several arrows from his quiver. Steadying himself on the swaying branch, he notched an arrow, drew back the stubborn wood, steel muscles moving under his naked back, took careful aim . . .

"Twang!"

Like a plucked violin the bow sang his single note, polished wood flickered in the light of torches and one of Trakor's captors threw wide his arms and sank into a briefly twitching heap. Before his fellows could grasp the significance of what was taking place three more of their number were down, each with a thin-bodied arrow protruding from his chest or back.

There was a general scrambling as those holding Trakor released him and threw themselves headlong to escape the rain of death. The advancing wave of warriors halted with breathtaking abruptness, those behind the front rank crashing into it. Momentarily freed, Trakor looked wildly about him, as confused as the others.

"Run!" shouted Tharn. "Into the jungle, Trakor!"

The youth heard—and obeyed. As he broke into a run, one of Gerdak's fighting men, either more courageous than his companions or angered beyond reason at losing their prize, scrambled to his feet and lifted his spear for a cast at the flying figure.

Again Tharn's bow twanged and a tufted arrow appeared magically embedded in the spearman's chest. Voicing a piercing shriek he toppled back, spear rolling from his fingers.

Tharn was already among the low-

er branches of a tree when Trakor came crashing into the jungle. As the boy plowed past, the cave lord reached down with one arm and caught him under the arms, lifting him to the branch beside him before the youngster was fully aware of what was happening.

"Tharn!" It was a gasp of such utter relief that the giant Cro-Magnard smiled.

"I thought I left you safe in a tree," he said.

"I meant to stay there, Tharn," Trakor admitted sheepishly. "But I heard one of them shout to the others that you had been captured and was being held in Gerdak's cave. I thought that because of the darkness I might pass among them without being recognized, reach the chief's cave and in some way set you free."

"You could never have done it." Tharn's voice was stern, revealing nothing of his inner feelings. He was more deeply touched by this evidence of loyalty than he cared to admit. For this untrained boy to pit his relatively puny muscles against an entire community in an effort to rescue his benefactor was proof enough that here was material for the shaping of a great warrior; and with this thought Tharn's last remaining reluctance to be saddled with Trakor during the search for Dylara disappeared.

THE warriors of Gerdak appeared to have recovered their courage; already several of them were entering the jungle in search of Trakor and the mysterious bowman. Two of them passed cautiously beneath the very tree in which their quarry was seated. Tharn touched his own lips in warning, pointed up at the branches overhead, then lifted the youth to his back and climbed in perfect silence to where he had left the captive Roban.

In the dim light Tharn could see the whites of rolling, fear-filled eyes and beads of perspiration dotting the

receding forehead. A muffled chattering pushed through the wad of leaves and the prisoner shrank away as far as the vines binding his wrists to the tree would permit.

The cave lord was undecided as to his next step. He dared not remove the gag from Roban's lips and question him here. A single shout would bring Gerdak's men to the scene; and while this would mean little if any danger to Tharn and his new-found companion, it could mean he might lose the services of Roban as involuntary guide.

The alternative was to carry Roban deeper into the jungle where he might be questioned without interruption, but Tharn knew that Trakor could not hope to follow through the tree tops.

There was but one answer: he must carry both of them. Quickly he loosened Roban's bonds and swung him lightly across one shoulder, then turned to Trakor.

"Lock your arms about my neck," he said.

There was wonder and doubt in Trakor's expression as understanding came to him. But such was his faith and confidence that he did not hesitate to comply with the order.

And once more Trakor, heart in his mouth, rode the skyway. Where before the awful depths had sent cold fear to his core, he was now confident and unafraid; yet actually the danger of plunging earthward was far greater this time. Bough after bough bent perilously beneath their triple burden as Tharn threaded his way, like a tightrope artist, along them, held erect only by his uncanny sense of balance. Constantly he was forced to search out branches of sufficient strength, stepping out and onto them without the additional safety of a steady hand hold.

Fifteen minutes of this was enough to satisfy him he was beyond any territory Gerdak's warriors would reach before dawn. The search would go on,

of course, until Roban, dead or alive, was found; for he was son of a chief and not lightly to be abandoned.

Near the pinnacle of a towering tree Tharn lowered his two passengers to adjoining branches. While Trakor watched, he removed Roban's gag, after warning him to utter no outcry on pain of instant death. The youth nodded violently in agreement, and for a moment he was unable to speak so cramped were his jaws.

Tharn glanced to where Trakor sat, an interested spectator to Roban's discomfiture. "This is the chief's son?"

Trakor nodded. "He is Roban."

Tharn turned his sharp eyes to the captive, who was glowering at him in mingled fear and hatred, and said:

"A few suns ago you saw a party of Ammadians scaling the cliffs near your caves. Exactly where was this?"

Roban scowled unpleasantly. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You know well enough. Answer me or die!"

"You would not dare kill me," Roban blustered. "I am Gerdak's son. Unless you let me go at once he will come with many warriors and hunt you down. He will kill you, but not quickly. First he will take his knife and . . ."

He broke off suddenly, gasping as Tharn's fingers bit into his skinny shoulder. "I, too, can use a knife! Answer my questions quickly or I will prove it to you!"

Roban licked dry lips. "What do you want to know?" he mumbled.

"The exact spot where the Ammadians climbed those cliffs."

"What are Ammadians?"

THARN described them in a few words and Roban nodded grudgingly. "Yes, I saw them. There is a place in the cliffs, a sun's march to the west of my father's caves, where a river tumbles over the edge. It was there they climbed the cliffs."

"He is lying!" Trakor exclaimed. "At the cooking fires he said it was east of our caves."

Roban's small eyes, evil and rat-like, swung toward him. "Your mother was a hyena! Wait till my father gets his hands . . ."

Tharn shook him until his teeth rattled. "Where?" he growled. "The truth this time or I throw you to a lion!"

The words tumbled out. "Half a march to the west. There is a low point in the cliff there, making it easy to climb. They are not good climbers; it took them a long time to . . ."

"Were there shes with them?"

"Shes?" The youth's beady eyes flickered. "I - I cannot say. I did not see . . ."

Tharn shook him again. "Enough of your lies!" he thundered. "How many shes were with them?"

"T-t-two." Roban was thoroughly frightened now. "I saw no others, although there may have—"

"Describe them."

"One had black hair; the other's hair was the color of Dyta, the sun, as he seeks his lair for the night. Both were very beautiful, although the black-haired she was less beautiful."

Tharn's chest swelled with elation. At last he had found the trail of Dylara and those who held her. He was eager to be on his way, flying through the trees to wrest her from the Ammadians. They were only five suns ahead—a distance he could cover in a quarter that time . . .

His gray eyes went to where Trakor sat watching him. As those eyes met his, the youth smiled. "The golden-haired one must be Dylara," he said. "Your search is nearly ended, Tharn. Hurry on to her."

The cave lord caught the faint note of sadness in the young man's voice and his admiration for the lad went still higher. Even as he was urging Tharn to go on without him it was

with the knowledge that were the cave lord to do so it would mean Trakor's doom. Trakor could not now return to the caves of Gerdak without being slain on sight; yet to remain alone in the jungle would mean certain death.

Tharn rose to his feet on a swaying branch, light from the moon picking out his slow smile. "Come, Trakor," he said. "We must reach that point at the cliff before dawn."

Trakor offered a protest. "But I will only slow—"

In reply Tharn picked him bodily from the branch and placed him across his shoulder, hearing the young man's sigh of relief as he did so.

"But what about me?" cried Roban. "You can not leave me here!"

Tharn looked at him in simulated surprise. "Have you forgotten? Your father is coming with many warriors to hunt me down. You, yourself, have said so. Wait for them here."

"But Tarlok may find and eat me!"

"Even Tarlok does not stoop to carnion," Tharn pointed out. Before Gerdak's son could reply, Tharn and Trakor were gone into the inky depths below.

CHAPTER VI JALTOR'S DECISION

KNUCKLES pounding heavily against his door awakened Garlud, nobleman of Ammad. There was an urgency in the sound that brought him bolt upright from his pillow in alarm.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Open!" thundered a heavy voice. "Open in the name of Jaltor of Ammad!"

Hardly able to believe his ears Garlud left his bed and groped for the brazier of coals kept in one corner of the room. Igniting a tallow-soaked bit of cloth from it, he lighted two of the room's candles, crossed to the door and unbarred it.

Four stalwart warriors wearing the tunics of Jaltor's personal guard pushed into the room, leaving Garlud's major-domo, who had brought them there, hovering anxiously outside. At sight of the latter's worried face Garlud smiled a reassurance he was far from feeling and said, "Return to your bed, Bokut. I will see my visitors to the door when they are ready to leave."

He closed the door on Rokut's unrelieved expression and turned to Jaltor's men. One of them he recognized immediately as Curzad, captain of the king's guard, whose strong intelligent face was set in grim lines.

"Well, Curzad," Garlud said lightly, "your expression is forboding enough to put fear in the bravest of men. What errand brings you here?"

"My master's respects, noble Garlud," the captain replied woodenly, "and he bids me escort you to the palace at once."

"Does it require four of you to help me find my way to Jaltor's palace?" Garlud demanded, his voice suddenly sharp.

The captain's face seemed even bleaker. "I obey my orders, noble Garlud. I must ask you to don clothing at once and come with us."

For a moment it seemed that Garlud was about to refuse . . . then a slight smile crooked the corners of his mouth and he turned to take up his tunic. He slipped into the garment without haste, drew the strings of his sandals tight about his ankles, then straightened.

"I am ready," he said.

IT WAS a cold, forbidding room, its walls, ceiling and floor of bare roughened gray stone, and located deep beneath the palace of Jaltor, supreme ruler of all Ammad. Against the far wall was a narrow bed occupied by the naked body of an elderly man. It was a body thin to the point of emaciation, the ribs standing out

sharp and distinct beneath yellowing skin. Two middle-aged men, their expressions grave, were gingerly applying liquid-soaked cloths against scorched blotches covering the naked man's chest. The man himself appeared to be in a comatose state, although from time to time he groaned and stirred feverishly under the attempts to soothe his suffering.

There was another man in the room—a man of such appearance that he dominated it through his physical dimensions alone. In height he was a full seven inches beyond six feet, yet built proportionately so that he did not seem that tall. His wide shoulders seemed to fill the room, his body sloping to narrow hips and long powerful legs. His face was almost startlingly handsome, with a fierce regal cast to its large, sharp-lined features. Chill black eyes of exceptional brilliance burned from beneath heavy black brows that matched the thick, slightly curling growth above a high rounded forehead. It was the face of a man of strength and intelligence, a man ruthless and proud and yet who could be given to quixotic acts of kindness, a man dictatorial but usually just, a man incapable of brooking interference.

He was pacing the room now with quick restless strides, badly restrained anger riding his expression. Once a quick turn caused him to brush against one of four stools grouped about a wooden table set on four crossed timbers, and he kicked the stool viciously aside causing it to shatter against the wall.

At the sound of splintering wood the man on the bed cried out in such utter fear that his two attendants fell back. He did not appear fully conscious however and they resumed their attempts to ease his pain.

That cry of fear had altered the pacing of the tall man momentarily and he turned his burning eyes on the men at the bedside. "Is he awake?" he

asked sharply, his deep voice beating against the walls like surf against a rocky shore.

One of the attendants shook his head nervously. "Not yet, Most-High. But soon now, I think. He is old and weak and the burns are grievous."

"Time is short and he must not die yet."

"Yes, noble Jaltor."

Again there was silence within the room, broken only by the mutterings of the half-conscious man and the heavy tread of feet as Jaltor resumed his pacing. . . .

A brief knock at the room's only door brought Jaltor around sharply. "Enter!" he thundered.

The door opened and four guards came in. With them was a trim figured man a few years short of middle-age, his strong regular features impassive. As his escort halted he continued on into the room, pausing only when he stood facing Ammad's monarch.

"Greetings, noble Jaltor," he said quietly. "You sent for me?"

Anger and bewildered sorrow seemed to be fighting for dominance in the ruler's expression. "I thought you my friend, Garlud!" he burst out suddenly. "How could a senseless ambition so drive you that you would turn against your king?"

The blood seemed to drain from Garlud's cheeks and his eyes went wide in shocked wonder. "Turn against you?" he repeated, aghast. "What madness is this?"

Jaltor's eyes narrowed and a sneer curled his upper lip. "Before you add lies upon lies, Garlud, give greetings to a friend of yours."

With these words the king stepped aside, for the first time permitting Garlud to see the man on the bed.

The nobleman's jaw dropped. "Why, it's old Heglar!" he exclaimed. "What in the God's name has happened to him?"

"What usually happens to enemies

of Jaltor?"

GARLUD took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You have spoken in riddles from the moment I came in here. For almost forty summers—since we were boys together—we have been more like brothers than friends. For that reason, if no other, I believe I am entitled to an explanation instead of badgering and half-veiled threats."

Jaltor's face darkened. "I'm the one who demands an explanation! Why did you set Heglar to attempt my life this afternoon?"

"I — set . . ."

"Do you deny," thundered the king, "that this very morning you held a long and carefully guarded conversation with Heglar in an ante-room outside my audience hall?"

"It is true that I spoke with him this morning," Garlud said slowly. "We did not talk for long, nor were we 'guarded' about it."

"I see!" Jaltor's tone was triumphant. "And what did the two of you talk about?"

"He sought me out as I entered the room on my way to the audience chamber. He drew me into a corner and asked if I had had word from Jotan, my son, recently. I told him I had not, but that I expected him to return within half a moon, perhaps even sooner."

Understanding dawned suddenly in Garlud's face and he added: "I wondered then why he drew me aside to ask the question, but at the time I thought little about it."

"And now?" Jaltor urged mockingly.

"I am beginning to see he had a reason of his own."

"You deny any part in the plot to kill me?"

"I do."

"But you knew there was such an attempt made this afternoon?"

"I heard some such rumor."

"But," persisted Jaltor, "you did not think it necessary that you learn if your friend—your *brother*, as you said a moment ago—had been injured in that attempt?"

"I was assured you were not even scratched," Garlud replied quietly.

"Humph!" Jaltor paced up and down a time or two, his face working, the great hands opening and closing spasmodically. Abruptly he stopped in front of the other and bent until his face almost touched Garlud's.

"Before you walked into this room, if anyone had asked for your opinion of Heglar what would you have said?"

"That I knew him well and liked and respected him."

"Would you have said he was an honorable man?"

"Certainly."

"Have you ever known him to tell a lie?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Does he have any reason to hate you?"

"None that I know of."

"Have you any idea why he tried to kill me?"

"None. I am completely surprised that he tried to do so."

"Then why," Jaltor thundered suddenly, "did he say his attempt to kill me was engineered by *you*?"

Garlud met his angry glare without visible emotion. "I can hardly be expected to answer that question, Most-High, since this is the first I have heard of such a charge."

"Then Heglar lied in so naming you?"

"He—is mistaken."

Jaltor snorted. "Don't bandy words with me! When one man says he talked with another about killing a third, he cannot be *mistaken*. He is either telling the truth or lying. Which is it, in this case?"

"If Heglar's mind was clear at the time he so accused me, then he lied!"

"But my good Garlud," cried Jaltor, his reasoning tone a mockery, "you

told me only a moment ago that to your knowledge Heglar is an honorable man and does not tell lies."

"Then it must be," Garlud said, openly serene, "that he has started to tell them now. Either that or his mind has become affected by his disease. It is common knowledge that there is a sickness in his throat and he has only a few moons of life remaining."

JALTOR turned on his heel and began his pacing anew. The four guards remained stiffly at attention near the door, their eyes fixed unseeingly on the opposite wall, their ears obviously hearing none of this. Against the far wall the two attendants continued their unceasing efforts to bring consciousness and comfort to the old man on the bed.

Without pausing in his pacing, Jaltor said, his voice more subdued now: "It is useless to throw doubt on Heglar's sanity, noble Garlud. After his bungling attempt on my life I questioned him. He told me it was his own idea to take my life, that no one else had anything to do with it. Over and over he said that, even when my questions called for no such answer, until I began to suspect he was trying to shield an accomplice. When I charged him with this he became so upset I was sure he lied. So I had my guards torture him into telling the truth. That is when he named you."

"A man will say anything to escape torture, Most-High," Garlud pointed out calmly.

"Do you think I'm not aware of that?" growled the monarch. "It was not until he endured torture I doubt I could have stood up under that he gave your name."

"Naturally, in view of our long friendship, I thought he was lying. I ordered further torture to bring out the truth. Again and again he lost consciousness under the white-hot iron, and each time we revived him he gave your name. Finally I was con-

vinced despite my reluctance. I then sent for you to hear the charge from Heglar's own lips."

Garlud shook his head. "I cannot believe that you would so easily turn against me, my friend. One man's unsupported word—and you believe the worst of me."

Jaltor's expression did not soften. "A word wrung from a man after long torture, noble Garlud, carries beyond ordinary denial."

"Would you wish to put me to the same test?" Garlud asked grimly.

"No. You are comparatively young and a brave man. Should you will yourself to deny Heglar's charge, no amount of physical suffering would wring a confession from you."

"Your pardon, Most-High." It was one of the men at the bedside who spoke. "The man is conscious now, but I fear he is dying."

"Good," Jaltor motioned to his erstwhile friend. "Come, Garlud, hear these things from the man's own lips."

They approached the bed, the two attendants falling back respectfully. From the narrow surface Heglar looked up at them, his faded blue eyes glazed with pain his rib-ridged chest rising and falling with shallow, uneven breathing. The smell of burned flesh came from his body in sickening emanations and his lips were torn where he had bitten them in agony.

Jaltor said stonily, "I have brought the noble Garlud here to listen to your charges, Heglar. Now accuse him or clear his name!"

The faded blue eyes flickered to the erect figure of the other man. It was not until the third effort that he was able to speak.

"I failed, Garlud." The words were barely audible. "Forgive me, my friend. They . . . made me tell. I am . . . old. Once they would not . . . have been able . . ."

Compassion came into Garlud's expression. "Heglar, Heglar," he said softly. "You know I had nothing to

do with your attempt to kill Jaltor. What have I done to you that makes you say this awful thing about me?"

Was there a flicker of remorse in those faded blue eyes. If so, it was gone before Garlud could be sure. "It . . . is useless, Garlud," the feeble voice whispered. "I had to . . . tell him."

"You are dying, Heglar." Sweat stood out on Garlud's forehead. "Would you face the God-Whose-Name-May-Not-Be-Spoken-Aloud with a lie upon your lips?"

"I . . . I . . ."

The noble's hand closed on the old man's shoulder. "The truth, Heglar! Who is the real one behind this?"

The aged eyes closed and Heglar's face began to work. "No! No! I have . . . no . . ."

"You must tell us, Heglar! Speak, man!"

Once more the lips opened. "I — I . . . Rhoa!"

Abruptly Heglar's head rolled to one side, his body went limp and with his mate's name on his lips he died.

FOR a long moment there was silence within the room. Garlud stood as though turned to stone, his eyes fastened unbelievably on the lifeless face of the old man. It was a tortured face; death had brought peace to it. What terrible compulsion, Garlud wondered dully, had forced an honorable man to die with a lie upon his lips?

"You have heard, noble Garlud?"

It was Jaltor's deep voice—stern, unflinching, empty of feeling. Garlud looked up into those piercing black eyes and despite himself he felt a tiny chill move along his spine.

"I heard, Most-High."

Jaltor passed a hand over his own face—a slow pressing gesture that momentarily left the skin white beneath its tan. "For the sake of our long friendship," he said thickly, "I am prepared to temper justice with

mercy. Admit your part in the plot and I will spare your life. Although," he added, "I will leave you nothing else. Your wealth is confiscate, your palace will go to the noble next in line, as is our custom, and you shall be turned from Ammad. Your king has spoken!"

And if I persist in my claim of innocence?" Garlud said evenly.

"The evidence is plain. You will be put to death."

"Very well." Garlud did not hesitate. "Order your guards to kill me then, my friend! I shall die as honorably as I lived during the years when we were friends."

Jaltor's jaw hardened. "And what of Jotan?" he said coldly.

Something akin to fear darkened Garlud's eyes. "My son? What of him? Surely your sense of justice has not so rotted that you would harm him!"

Sudden rage twisted Jaltor's countenance. "No man speaks so to Jaltor of Ammad and lives!"

Garlud's smile was undismayed. "Have you forgotten, Most-High. I have already been sentenced to death!"

"And by your attitude," Jaltor shouted, "you have sentenced your son to the same fate."

"On what grounds?"

"I need no grounds! I know your son, noble Garlud. When he hears that you are dead and that it was my order, he will attempt to avenge you. I know the love he holds for you, and it will be that mistaken loyalty which will lead him into an attempt to assassinate me. Your power is great in Ammad, Garlud; I helped you gain that power because you were my friend. Because you have won the affection and respect of many warriors they would rise to his leadership against me. All Ammad might be torn by civil war. For that reason Jotan must die!"

Garlud's face was livid with rage

and his hands were trembling. "Then kill us both, you son of Gubo. You have become a fearful, evil old man who hides from shadows and who fears all men—even his friends! Kill us both that we may not pollute our lungs with the air you breathe!"

WITH an almost casual sweep of his mighty arm Jaltor hurled the raging nobleman into the grasp of the guards. "Confine him to the lowest pit beneath the palace!" he thundered. "Let the rats chew him a few suns before I have him torn to bits!"

Without a backward glance the king strode from the room. He made his way up flight after flight of steps, through room after room of the sleeping palace, until he reached his own wing. Through several long, winding corridors he moved, oblivious to the salutes of startled guards on night duty, until he entered his private apartment. He went directly to his sleeping quarters, curtly ordered his two personal slaves into the next room, then undressed quickly and got into bed.

But not to sleep. For over an hour he tossed on the huge bed wooing sleep that would not come. Finally he rose, drew a richly woven robe about his shoulders and stepped out onto a small balcony overlooking one entire half of the vast city six floors below.

The rays of a full moon bathed the impressive scene. Because of the lateness of the hour no lights gleamed from windows of the box-like buildings and the broad streets were deserted.

Slowly reason was beginning to take hold of him as anger faded. Was Garlud correct in saying that he was becoming an old man fleeing from shadows, suspicious of all men? He went back over the golden days when he and Garlud were young warriors taking their first taste of battle against the then scattered states that

today made up the country of Ammad. He recalled the day Garlud had saved his life by leaping in front of him and taking the tearing impact of a thrown spear. Garlud had very nearly died of that wound and he—Jaltor—had remained day and night at his bedside until the crisis passed.

And that was the man he had sentenced to death! The man whose friendship had meant more to him than all his kingdom. Surely personal ambition alone could not have driven him into plotting the assassination of his best friend!

There was something behind all this that did not meet the eye. Had the would-be assassin been anyone other than old Heglar he would have dismissed his involvement of Garlud as a trumped up lie and executed the man on the spot.

Had Heglar lied? Was there some motivation so strong that the old man had been forced into bearing false witness against one of the most loved noblemen in all Ammad? Was all this some intricate plot, with Garlud instead of Jaltor as the real victim?

Jaltor, stern, ruthless and high-handed though he was, was a man with ideals and a strong sense of honor. Also, he was extremely intelligent and a veteran of the machinations of intrigue. The more he thought about this whole business the more certain he was that all the facts were not yet revealed.

For a long time he stood there on the small balcony, staring out over Ammad with unseeing eyes. After a while a slow smile came to his strong lips and he nodded his head a time or two in satisfaction. There was a way . . .

Leaving the balcony he strode quickly to the room's single door and threw it wide. "Quick!" he snapped to one of the startled slaves, "tell Curzad I want him here at once!"

When the captain of the guards, as

alert and bright-eyed as though he had not been dragged from a sound sleep by Jaltor's summons, appeared in the doorway the king bade him enter and close the door.

"Curzad," he said, "you have known the noble Garlud almost as long as I have. Does it seem likely to you that he would be mixed up in a plot to kill me?"

The iron-faced warrior shook his head impassively. "No, Most-High. His love and respect for you are beyond doubt."

"You think I acted unwisely in finding him guilty?"

"That is not for me to say, Most-High."

"I know that! But you are not made of stone; you must have formed some opinion."

"It is not wise to hold an opinion which differs from that of Ammad's king."

JALTOR gestured with sharp impatience. "This is man to man, Curzad. Give me your honest impressions of this affair."

"If you command it, Most-High. I do not believe the noble Garlud had anything to do with old Heglar's attempt to knife you. I think the old one hated Garlud for some reason and named him because of that hatred."

"But you knew Heglar's reputation as a completely truthful man?"

"I do not say he would lie for another's purpose. But for his own . . . that is a different matter."

"But he did not give Garlud's name willingly, Curzad. Only after prolonged torture could we wrest the name from his lips."

The captain shrugged. "Would you for even a moment have believed him otherwise. Old Heglar was no fool, Most-High. Were his motive strong enough for bringing ruin to Garlud he would have planned it exactly that way. An accusation lightly given is usually lightly taken."

Jaltor smote a fist into his palm. "By the God, Curzad, I believe you've hit it! Only my thought is that the plan was not his. When a man hates another both are usually aware of that hatred—and Garlud was at a complete loss to understand why he was accused."

"That is true, Most-High."

"Very well, here's what must be done." Jaltor began to pace the floor, speaking the while. "I want you to speak with the guards who were with you when I questioned Garlud tonight. Swear them to complete secrecy on the entire matter on pain of death. The same goes for the two attendants who were working over Heglar at the time."

"It shall be done, Most-High."

"Good! Now who in Garlud's household knows you brought him here?"

"We encountered only Bokut, his chief steward, and two guards—one at an outer gate and one stationed at his palace entrance."

"Very well, take those three into custody. Question them as to whom they told of the incident and place *those* under arrest as well. Leave no one who can spread word that Garlud was brought to the palace at my orders."

"You see what I'm getting at, Curzad? Let us say there is someone whose identity we do not know at the bottom of this plot against Garlud. Heglar makes his clumsy attempt at killing me and fails according to plan. I order him tortured to learn the names of others involved. He gives me Garlud's name."

"Now, if I believe the charge, Garlud is arrested and executed, and the mysterious someone is satisfied. But if I do not believe the charge Garlud remains free, and this unknown person must try again or give up and the matter is never solved."

"But say Garlud simply disappears without anyone knowing what's become of him. Has he learned of what

was in store for him and gone into hiding, trying the while to learn who is responsible for his plight? Or have I executed him secretly? Is Heglar still alive and in a position to eventually expose the true culprit?

"The man we want is going to have to get answers to those questions, Curzad. He'll use great care at first; but when each effort meets a blank wall he'll become increasingly desperate. Desperate men make false moves, Curzad—then is when we'll have him!"

The captain nodded expressionlessly but there was a gleam of admiration in his deep-set eyes. "And what of Garlad himself, Most-High? Shall I have him removed from the pits and placed in more comfortable quarters?"

Jalton pulled thoughtfully at his lower lip. "N-no, I think not. Let him stew there awhile. I am not giving up my suspicions of him entirely, Curzad; old Heglar's dying statement can not be utterly disregarded until we have proof he was lying."

"And should Jotan, his son, return from Sephar while his father languishes in the pits?"

The king nodded. "I have thought of that. It may be necessary to take him and his men into custody before they reach the city itself. It would defeat my purpose were he allowed to enter Ammad and start hunting for his father. On the other hand I cannot arrest him openly; it would tell our mysterious enemy more than I want him to know."

"Let us wait a few suns to decide that, Curzad. We have the time; Jotan and his men are not due for half a moon yet. If our real quarry has not revealed himself in, say, seven suns, I shall send you and a detachment of guards out to intercept Jotan."

CHAPTER VII THE SPIDER MEN

DYLARA awakened with a convulsive start as the lofty branch upon which she had been sleeping swayed and bent beneath suddenly added weight.

As she started up, a scream rising to her lips, hands reached out of the night's impenetrable curtain and tore her roughly from where she sat. Instinctively she attempted to struggle free, only to receive a buffet alongside the head that left her limp and only half conscious.

Her first impression was that one of the great apes, occasionally glimpsed among the more impenetrable reaches of jungle, had seized her; for she could feel coarse long hair matting its chest and arms. Even as the thought sent her heart sinking with fear and loathing, she knew she was mistaken, since the creature's body was much too slender, its arms too thin and frail to belong to one of the bulky anthropoids.

That she was in deadly peril Dylara did not doubt, but not to know the form such peril took was inconceivably worse. It was this fear of the unknown that crystallized her determination to break from this stifling embrace or die in the attempt; and she was gathering her strength for the effort when her captor suddenly whirled about on the narrow branch and, with her across his back, dived headlong into space!

The shock was too much for human nerves. Dylara voiced a single scream and her senses fled under the lash of pure panic.

She came back to reality to find she was being borne through the trees with incredible speed. Now and then a vine flicked against her shivering body or leaves brushed against her face, and several times the thing carrying her leaped outward through space that seemed boundless, only to

land lightly upon a swaying branch in another tree.

Even Tharn, she realized, could not have matched the creature's amazing agility, for it was using both hand and feet with equal dexterity after the manner of little Nobar, the monkey.

Gradually, as the likelihood of being dashed to earth seemed more and more remote, Dylara began to think once more of escape. The time was not now, of course; she could only cling desperately to her captor's thin shoulders and wait for this breathless journey to end. Eventually those wiry muscles must tire and the creature stop—then she would make her bid for freedom.

Abruptly and without slackening its pace the hairy thing uttered a piercing shriek like nothing Dylara had ever heard before. Twice more the awful sound rang out; and then, far ahead, came an answering cry faint and wavering.

Instantly the creature put on an added burst of speed, rocketing through the branches in dizzying bounds that threatened to tear away Dylara's none too certain hold. So swift was the pace now that within a few minutes a wide clearing loomed ahead and her captor began to slip groundward.

Suddenly the hairy creature halted on a wide limb bordering the clearing as a host of shadowy forms rose around him. There was not enough light for Dylara to make use of her eyes but she sensed these were the figures of creatures similar to the one which held her.

They chattered shrilly among themselves in a completely unfamiliar tongue for several moments, then all of them moved ahead a short distance until the clearing itself was reached.

Dylara was expecting the entire party to descend to the ground. But instead they began to climb higher and higher. At last the one carrying

her came to a halt well within the embrace of a jungle patriarch; and at that moment Uda, the moon, appeared from behind a cloud and poured her silver rays into the clearing.

FOR the first time since her capture she was able to see well enough to distinguish objects. She was surrounded by a group of some ten or twelve man-like beings—but beings like nothing she had ever dreamed of!

All were well over six feet in height, but so thin in body they seemed much taller. All were naked except for girdles of grass about their hips, the rest of their bodies being covered with monkey-like hair. Their arms and legs were incredibly long and thin, their toes long and prehensile. Each face was hairless and almost perfectly round, containing small beady eyes, a brief blob of nose, a tiny lipless mouth and almost no chin at all. It was more the face of some particularly repellent insect—a comparison that leaped to Dylara's mind at sight of the long hairy limbs, the thin torsos pinched in deeply at the waist and the quick, jerky way in which they moved restlessly about her.

The one holding her let her slide from its back and the others moved closer, reaching out to pluck at her tunic with abnormally long nailless fingers, their voices like the rising skirl of an insect swarm.

Angrily she pushed away the exploring fingers. "Who are you?" she cried, "and what do you want of me?"

One of the things, evidently angered at being repulsed, snaked out a long arm and caught her roughly about the waist, dragging her to him. Instantly the one that had brought her here leaped upon the intruder, nearly sweeping Dylara from her precarious footing on the branch. For an instant the pair clawed frantically at each other, but their companions

pushed between them and broke up the battle.

The incident seemed to touch off a long and heated discussion, during which Dylara was apparently forgotten. They stood in a tight knot among the branches, their ridiculous faces pushed together in almost a solid lump, while their keening voices went on and on with a monotonous kind of intensity.

A slow-moving cloud stole across Uda's shining face, plunging the scene into heavy darkness. Dylara felt sudden hope leap in her breast. Surely they were too intent with their arguing to notice her if she slipped away! Besides, how could even the keenest eye pierce the blackness of a jungle night?

She took a slow step away from them, balancing herself lightly on the broad bough. Another—and still another. The high-pitched debate went on in full volume.

Cautiously she lowered herself to a branch immediately below, then waited with pounding heart to learn if her move had been detected.

Nothing had changed! She bent again . . . and from nowhere a sinuous arm slithered out of the blackness, caught her about the middle and jerked her back and into the group.

The discussion appeared to be ended. One of the creatures swept the cave girl into his embrace and continued to climb toward the stars, leaving his companions where they were.

A solid mass of foliage loomed suddenly in front of Dylara—and in that moment Uda came into the open sky once more. In the few seconds left for Dylara to drink in the scene she saw a sight she was never to forget.

SUSPENDED among branches of the trees about her were conical huts of twigs and grasses. Their

floors evidently did not rest on the boughs themselves but each separate structure bobbed lightly up and down from the end of a thick grass rope tied to a branch overhead. In the base of each was an opening only large enough to permit entry on only hands and knees.

Dylara's breath went out of her in a sudden gasp. Now she knew why her first impression of these creatures had likened them to insects. There was a species of spider that built nests above the ground—nests conical in shape and swung from twigs!

The hair-covered arms, legs and bodies, the pinched-in abdomens, the round heads set flush with the shoulders. These were spider men!

A wave of unbearable nausea overwhelmed her, robbing her of all strength. Dazed, she felt herself being thrust through an opening in one of the swaying huts, felt the spider-man follow her in—then once more she was lifted by a pair of long thin arms.

Weakly she lifted her hands to strike out at the loathsome thing holding her—then blackness poured into her brain and she knew no more.

FOR the better part of two weeks Tharn and Trakor made little progress along the trail taken by those Ammadians who held Dylara. With the patient stoicism of all creatures of the wild he accepted the unavoidable delay in his plans brought on by his acquisition of the untrained Trakor; and as the best way of lightening his burden, set out to school the boy in the lore of the jungle.

Most of that first week was spent in acquiring the knack of using the tree tops as a highway. Trakor, like most Cro-Magnards, was accustomed to climbing in search of fruit and birds' nests. But when it came to hurtling from bough to bough and tree to

tree in a dizzying pathway high above ground, he was both hesitant and doubtful.

Patiently Tharn strove to build up the youth's confidence. At first he spent hours in developing within him that sense of balance which is the basis for forest-top travel. Once Trakor could thread his way along a swaying branch a hundred feet in the air without reaching wildly for a hand-hold, Tharn undertook to teach him the grasp, swing and release used in plunging through space from one jungle giant to the next.

At first the boy fell many times and his body was a mass of painful bruises. But he endured the pain without complaint, returning to the branches for more with unabated enthusiasm. Hour after hour, day after day he strove for something approaching Tharn's expertise at the craft, and while he knew he would never succeed in reaching the high standards of his teacher, he was gaining confidence that eventually he would near that mark.

Within a week he was bounding about the trees with a sure-footedness and celerity that brought praise from his companion. He took the utmost pleasure in challenging the jungle lord to arboreal races, and while he never won them he came close on several occasions. Soon his confidence passed into a cocksure attitude and he began to take long chances—leaping twenty feet across a treeless gap to catch some narrow limb waving in a strong breeze, or hurtling through space at the end of a trailing vine in imminent danger of being dashed to death on the ground below.

Nor did Tharn protest these activities or urge him to greater caution. The youth must learn from experience what could and could not be done. He gloried in Trakor's small triumphs and comforted him in his failures, and always he was careful not to say or do anything that would

weaken the boy's mounting confidence.

WHEN Tharn was satisfied the boy was reasonably at home among the trees, by night or by day, the second phase of his education was undertaken. He taught him to follow an animal's spoor along the dust of a game trail, he showed him how not only to classify each into its proper category but schooled him in such fine distinctions as judging an animal's height, weight and age from imprints left by its feet. Luckily Trakor was endowed with eyes and ears beyond the normal in keenness, and it was not long until he was able to give an excellent account of himself in woodcraft.

And daily his strength was increasing under the unaccustomed tasks imposed on his muscles. Swinging by the hands through mile after mile of branches molded biceps and back muscles into bands of steel and endowed his fingers with a vise-like grip. His body, already deeply tanned, became burned to a dusky hue and he began to fill out into a specimen of perfect manhood.

If Tharn chafed at the delay in his reunion with Dylara he did not display it and he continued the boy's education as though he had a lifetime to put into doing so. But Trakor knew what all this was costing the other, and while he never mentioned it, the determination grew to make it up to the cave lord. There was a bond between them now, based on mutual respect and admiration, plus a hero-worshipping desire on Trakor's part to become exactly like Tharn himself.

Exactly half a moon from the day Tharn had snatched Trakor from under the noses of Gerdak's warriors, the boy made his first kill—a fat buck that had come down to a water hole to drink. He had dropped upon its back from the lower branches of

a tree, as Tharn had taught him, and a knife thrust into its heart had brought it down.

They sat side by side among the branches of a tree, gorging themselves on strips of raw flesh hacked from the side of Trakor's kill, while below them a pack of Jackals quarreled over the buck's remains. Sunset was only minutes away and already dusk was seeping into the forest aisles.

Trakor was full of plans for the morrow. "When Dyla comes again," he was saying, "let us hunt out the lair of one of the great cats. I need a new loin cloth and I will cut one from the hide of Jalok or Tarlok—after I have slain him."

Tharn hid his smile by sinking his gleaming teeth into the meat in his hands. "And how will you go about killing Tarlok?" he said casually.

Trakor was surprised at the question. "The same way you slew Sadu the day we met. I will spring upon him from a tree and drive my knife into his heart."

"You will spring into his teeth!" Tharn said grimly. "Let this be your most important lesson: Seek no fight with the great cats. A life time in the jungle is not training enough to pick a quarrel with any of them. There will be times when one of them will stalk you down and trap you; then, if you are lucky, you instead of Tarlok or Jalok or Sadu will come out alive."

"But you have slain them!" Trakor argued.

"True. But never have I sought them out for that purpose. Each time we fought it was because I had no choice, and always the margin between victor and vanquished was so narrow it easily might have gone the other way."

"I am not afraid!"

"Fear has nothing to do with it. A true warrior does not doubt his bravery; only a coward feels he must prove to himself that he is brave.

Survival in the jungle depends on knowing and respecting its denizens; he who struts along the trails looking for trouble finds himself filling trouble's belly!"

And so Trakor changed the subject and they talked of other matters. But deep within the boy burned the determination to hunt down one of the great cats at the first opportunity. Tharn, knowing this—his own development had gone through the same stage—said no more on the subject.

WHILE they talked Tharn watched his companion, marvelling at the change these past two weeks had made in him. Trakor was every inch a true jungle dweller. He sat with his back comfortably against the tree bole, his shock of black hair falling almost to his shoulders in back and rudely hacked off above his eyes. His swelling chest and broad shoulders were burned almost black by the sun, the skin as clear and unblemished as a woman's. The thin waist, narrow supple hips and long straight legs were the hallmarks of a true warrior, and his sharp alert eyes and handsome clean-cut features were evidence of nobility and intelligence. Fate had placed worthy clay into Tharn's hands for molding and he looked upon his work and found it good.

With this realization came a decision. "Tomorrow," he said, "I must take up the trail of those who hold Dylara. Already she may be within the city of Ammad and I dare not wait longer."

Trakor flushed. "It is my fault. Had you not met me she might be with you at this moment."

"And had I not met you," Tharn said lightly, "I might still be looking for the trail I lost a moon earlier. Or Sadu might have caught and eaten me had I gone on instead of lingering here."

"A score of Sadus could not catch you!"

Tharn did not reply and his smile was hidden by the handful of leaves with which he wiped the blood of his meal from his lips. "Let us sleep now," he said quietly. "We have many suns of traveling ahead of us."

OTAR was utterly miserable. Fresh blisters had broken on his feet for the fourth day in a row and each step was agony. Life as a guard in Vokal's palace had not been strenuous enough to prepare him for a long journey into the jungle, and as he limped along in the company of his fifty companions he heaped silent curses upon the head of Ekbar, captain of Vokal's guards, who had selected him to take part in this mysterious excursion into the jungles surrounding Ammad.

Otar knew full well why he had been one of those so selected. The lovely Marua had chosen him as her mate instead of Ekbar, and the captain was allowing to pass no opportunity to keep them apart. True, Ekbar was leading the expedition and therefore was unable to take advantage of Otar's absence from the side of his lovely mate. But in view of his aching feet and terror of the grim jungle hemming him in night and day, this was small consolation.

This was the eighth day since Ammad's walls had faded into the south and still no word from Ekbar as to how much farther they must go. Night was not far distant; at any moment now the several advance scouts Ekbar sent on ahead each day would be straggling back to make their reports to the captain. That would be the signal to make camp for the night—something others of the party besides Otar were looking forward to.

In a column two abreast the fifty shuffled along, war spears ready in their hands, bows and arrow-filled quivers at their backs, a stone knife in the belt of each tunic. Over them

hung the brooding humid jungle on either side of the elephant path, while in their ears rose and fell the now familiar pattern of sound formed by buzzing insects, chattering monkeys and raucous-voiced birds. Except for the clouds of insects that had a way of working down inside a tunic this was not so bad. It was when night came and the challenging cries of Sadu and Tarlok and Jalok made hideous the darkness beyond the camp's circle of fires, that Otar knew the depths of fear. Then was when heavy paws padded against the earth nearby and yellow eyes gleamed out of the night.

"Here comes one of the scouts!" said the man next to Otar, pointing. "Look how excited he is!"

A stocky built man in a once white tunic was running swiftly along the path toward the column's head, waving his arms. Instantly Ekbar lifted his spear in a horizontal position and the column ground to a halt.

Otar could see the two of them, Ekbar and the scout, carrying on a heated discussion, but he was too far back to make out the words. While they talked, the remaining three scouts arrived and joined in the conversation.

It lasted for several minutes; then Ekbar, tall and square-shouldered, gave the signal to resume the march. Several of the troops groaned openly; but the groans changed to elated murmurs of satisfaction almost immediately when the winding trail debouched into a small circular clearing divided by a small jungle stream.

The order was given to make camp and prepare food. Those whose nightly duty it was to gather branches for a fiery circle to keep the cats at bay were called back when they started into the jungle—a matter that caused considerable discussion among the others.

THEY were not long left in doubt.

Ekbar gathered the warriors in a tight circle and, standing in its center, gave them their first explanation since leaving Ammad.

"An enemy force lies encamped an hour's march ahead of us," he said in his high-pitched, almost querulous voice. "For that reason we must forgo our nightly fires lest the glow be seen and the enemy warned. Instead, once you have eaten, you are to spend the night in the trees. A few of us will go on ahead under cover of darkness and learn the number of enemies we must face. Early on the morrow we attack!"

His chill eyes went around the circle, then he lifted one arm and began to point out individuals, calling their names and ordering each to step forward.

Otar, anger stiffening his jaw, was among the first to be summoned. When the new group reached six, Ekbar dismissed the others and bade them follow him.

Half an hour after leaving the main body darkness came down upon the seven Ammadian warriors, blacking out their immediate surroundings. Unconsciously they moved closer together and their voices stilled. The jungle was unfamiliar territory to most of them and a place where death might lay behind each bush along the way.

Presently they detected a wavering glow filtering through the trees ahead, and Ekbar warned them in a low voice to proceed with added caution. A little later he motioned them to a halt and went on ahead, his body crouched, his spear and knife ready for action.

He reappeared almost immediately. "They have made a dry camp in a small clearing just around a bend of the trail," he whispered. "Follow me and let not so much as a blade of grass bend under your feet!"

Like disembodied wraiths the seven

members of Vokal's palace guard crept among the towering trees to one side of the trail. With slow stealth they worked their way forward until they lay, side by side among the thick undergrowth at the clearing's edge. Trained ears would have marked their passage long before they reached that position, but the ears of the five sentries on duty were no keener than those of the average Ammadian.

Most of the camp lay sleeping behind barricades of burning branches, their huddled shapes beneath sleeping furs visible by light of flickering flames. The sentries were pacing to and fro, stopping occasionally to pass a remark or two among themselves. The only sounds came from the crackling wood of the fires and, very distant, the hunting squall of a leopard.

Ekbar's eyes, a bit keener than those of his companions, noticed something. "Look!" he whispered. "Several in a row of sleepers nearest us have bandages on their heads. Yes, and one of the sentries is carrying his arm in a sling. They've come through a fight of some kind recently."

Otar, who had been peering intently at the five sentries, voiced a muffled explanation.

"Your scouts were wrong, Ekbar!" he said, his voice rising to its normal volume. "These men are - -"

A savage hand about his neck choked off his words. "Quiet, you fool!" whispered Ekbar, his fingers tightening their hold.

One of the watch had lifted his head and was staring intently in their direction. After a long moment he shrugged slightly and busied himself with adding branches to the fire. Only then did Ekbar release his hold.

Otar, anger and bewilderment plain in his expression, massaged his aching neck. "I tell you," he whispered, "those are not enemies. They are warriors of the palace of the noble Garud of Ammad. One of those sen-

tries is Dretox, an acquaintance of mine who went with Jotan, Garud's son, to Sephar several moons ago. It is plain that they are returning to Ammad and we should go out and welcome them instead of skulking here in the bushes."

"And I say these men are enemies!" hissed Ekbar heatedly. "Listen and judge for yourself."

"The morning of the day we left Ammad an attempt was made on the life of Jaltor, our king. The news swept the city; I know that some of you, at least, must have heard it. Vokal, our master, as one of Ammad's noblemen, learned Garlad was behind the attempted assassination. On the direct and secret orders of Jaltor himself, Vokal has sent us to intercept and kill Jotan, who once he learns Garlad is dead after plotting to have the king slain, may attempt to even the score by leading a revolt that could plunge all Ammad into civil war.

"That is why we are here and that is why these men are enemies. And on the morrow we shall attack them and put them all to instant death!"

It was reason enough and they were satisfied. Such intrigues were common in Ammad; several of the six had served more than one nobleman during their lifetimes.

"One thing bothers me," Ekbar was whispering. "It was believed Jotan took fifty men with him to Sephar, also two friends who are sons of noblemen. These last two must be overcome and spirited away without learning our identity. When Jotan and the rest are dead, we will release the pair of them and let them find their way to Ammad. I want a suggestion on how that can be done."

No one spoke for a while. The sentries continued to move among the fires a few feet away, and the sounds of a nocturnal jungle rose and fell about them.

It was Ekbar himself who hit on

a plan, as beffited one of a captain's rank.

"We shall need one of those sleeping men," he said. "I will take two of you and circle the camp to the opposite side. After we have time enough to reach that point, the rest of you will make a noise of some kind to attract the guards' attention. Be careful not to make them too suspicious lest they rouse the camp. While they are looking in your direction, we will creep up and grab the first man we come to."

The men signified that they understood, and Ekbar, Otar and a warrior named Kopan set out to take up their arranged positions. Hardly were they ready when a low moaning sound rose from among the bushes across the clearing and the foliage there began to shake violently.

Instantly the five guards grouped behind that section of the burning circle nearest the disturbance. They raised their spears ready for casting and one of the five hurled a burning branch across the narrow ribbon of open ground.

"Now!" Ekbar grated.

STOOPING, the three men raced for the encampment. They cleared the burning barrier at a bound, snatched up the nearest of the sleeping figures, muffling his face with own sleeping furs before he could awaken, then turned and vanished into the jungle. So quickly had they acted, so swift and sure their motions, that none of the other sleepers so much as stirred and the guards never noticed.

The instant the abductors had disappeared the moans stopped and the shaking foliage stilled. For a long time the guards continued to stand there waiting, but when no other disturbance materialized they sighed with relief and went back to the restless patrolling.

Meanwhile Ekbar and his men were returning to their own camp, their

captive with them. They drew him into a sheltered place under the trees, lighted a small fire that his expression might tell them if he answered their questions with lies and went to work on him.

He was a young man, clear-eyed, intelligent and not at all frightened. He stared at his captors without recognition, obviously puzzled to find they were men of his own nationality.

"What is your name?" rasped Ekbar, scowling menacingly.

"Tykol—if that helps you any! What is the meaning of this? Who are you?"

"I will ask the questions here!" Ekbar snapped. "And you will answer them if you wish to see Dytta, the sun, again! Do you understand?"

"I understand well enough, but that does not mean I will tell you anything!"

Without the slightest change of expression Ekbar whipped out the knife at his belt and sank three inches of the cold flint into one of the man's thighs. Tykol cried out involuntarily and struggled to free his arms from the vines binding them to his sides.

Ekbar waited until his struggles ceased. A small stream of blood well-ed from the knife wound and began to drip against the leaves beneath.

"What," said Ekbar, "are the names of the two young noblemen accompanying Jotan?"

Tykol, his active mind racing, did not at once reply. It was clear these men meant no good to any of Jotan's followers. His cue was to simulate a certain amount of fear to satisfy them his answers were the truth until he could discover exactly what was afoot.

Ekbar leaned forward and lifted his knife again. "Shall I give you a second taste of this?" he growled.

Tykol appeared to flinch. "No," he mumbled. "I will tell you. Their names are Javan and Tamar."

"How many men are with them?"

"Thirty-seven."

"You lie!" Ekbar snarled. "Fifty were in the party when it left Ammad."

The young captive digested this information quickly. It proved these men were Ammadians like himself; how else could they have known that?

"I am not lying," he said sullenly. "Three nights ago lions attacked our camp and killed and ate the others, wounding many of the rest of us."

EKBAR, remembering the bandages he had glimpsed while spying on the camp, nodded to himself. It would make his task of wiping out the balance of them that much easier.

"What positions do these two men hold in the line of march during the day?" he demanded.

"Javan now marches at the head of the column."

The captain's head jerked up sharply. "Don't lie to me, you son of Gubo! Jotan marches there; he is in charge of his men. There is no need for you to attempt to shield him—he will be dead in a few hours!"

It was all Tykol needed. He knew now that he himself would not live to see tomorrow's sun; and while the thought was sobering enough it did not dim his determination to save the life of his beloved master.

And so Tykol threw back his head and laughed—laughed until a heavy blow from the fist of Ekbar sent him sprawling. The captain gestured angrily to the others to drag the youth upright again, then said:

"You laugh, fool. Does the thought of Jotan's death mean so little to you?"

"That is not why I laugh," Tykol told him, grinning. "I laugh because no act of yours can take his life—for he no longer has a life to take!"

Strong fingers twisted into the front of his tunic and jerked him forward. "What do you mean? The truth, jackal, or I cut you in bits!"

Tykol appeared properly cowed. "The lions got him—as they got the noble Tamar. It was terrible, I tell you! For hours they crouched just outside the circle of fires while their roars filled the night. We tried to drive - - -"

"Enough!" growled the captain. "We shall soon find out if you are lying. If our scouts learn Jotan is still with his men I promise you a slow and horrible death."

"And when you find I am telling the truth," Tykol said, feigning eagerness, "will you then let me go?"

Ekbar sat there fingering his knife, thinking. If this man spoke true words there would be no need for massacring Jotan's warriors. It would be far better to permit them to reach Ammad and tell of his death under Sadu's rending fangs. Thus the last threat to Vokal's plans would have been accomplished without an air of mystery behind it that some one, becoming curious, might dig into.

But he would need more than this man's word. On the morrow he would send scouts who could recognize Jotan, back to spy on the column. If Jotan was not there, then Tykol's story would be proved true; Ekbar would withdraw his men and return to Ammad, leaving the remnants of Jotan's troops to straggle back unmolested by him.

Either way he no longer had use of Tykol. His attention came back to the bound man in front of him. "Yes," he said, replying to the young man's last question, "you shall have your freedom. In fact I shall give it to you now."

With those words he lunged forward and drove his knife into Tykol's heart!

Thus died a true warrior—loyal unto death to the man he served, knowing his heroism would lie with his bones unknown, yet making his supreme sacrifice without hesitation and without self-pity.

Ekbar wiped clean his stone blade on the dead man's tunic and rose to his feet. "Haul this carrion deeper within the jungle," he told his sober-faced men, "and rouse the camp. We start back to Ammad at once."

CHAPTER VIII A PRIZE FOR VOKAL

"I TELL you it is useless, Jotan," Tamar said. "For three suns now we have beat the jungle searching for some sign of her. How long do you expect to keep up this useless hunt?"

There were five of them in the group: Jotan, Tamar and three of the former's best fighting men. They were seated on a fallen log at the edge of a narrow stream, having finished washing away the stains of jungle travel only minutes before. Directly overhead hung the midday sun, flooding them with humid heat, and hemming them in on all sides stood towering giants of the forest.

Jotan shook his head and said nothing. The strain and hopelessness of the last three days had aged him visibly: there were new lines in his face and his eyes were haggard. He recognized his injustice in subjecting his friends to the dangers of jungle travel, especially when their number was so small; but Dylara meant everything to him and he could not give her up without a struggle.

"I beg of you," Tamar persisted; "give up the search that we may turn about and rejoin the others. We are not equipped to follow this trail all the way back to Sephar. Already we have lost two of our men—one of them the only man among us who was qualified to track her down. For all we know she may be dead—the victim of one of the numerous cats infesting this section of the country."

"You may return if you like," snapped Jotan, stung by that last remark. "I am going on—alone if necessary!"

Oh, I know why you want to call it off," he went on, scowling. "You never had any use for her because she is a girl of the caves instead of a nobleman's daughter. But whether you like it or not, Dylara is the only woman I shall ever love and I am going to find her—or give my life in the attempt."

Tamar, hearing, knew his friend meant exactly what he said. It was useless to plead with him on the basis of not being able to pick up her trail. But there was another way—and he bored into it, playing it up for all it was worth.

"Your life is your own, Jotan," he said stiffly. "But do you have the right to sacrifice the lives of the rest of us in a quest that is completely hopeless. If we had found anything to indicate we were on the right trail I would not for an instant try to dissuade you. It is true I do not think the girl worthy of your love—but that is not important. You do love her and I would fight against the world in defense of your choice.

"But to go on this way without a single lead to show us we have even the faintest chance for success, to throw away the lives of these three men—and our own—is rank folly! Perhaps you regard it as some sort of admirable determination; in truth it is sheer stubbornness."

For a long time Jotan sat there staring with unseeing eyes at the sluggishly moving waters of the tiny river. There was no denying the truth in Tamar's words. He knew his best friend meant every word of his statement that he would back Jotan's choice of a mate against a world; he had proved that back in Sephar by saving Dylara's life by a bit of quick thinking, when he might as easily have let a plot against her go on to its inevitable end. Equally as undeniable was his statement that it was sheer injustice to sacrifice needlessly the lives of loyal men on what

could only be classified as a fool's errand.

Impulsively he turned to one of the three warriors sitting in a stolid row beside him. "Tell me, Itak," he said, "what is your greatest desire at this moment?"

"To serve you, noble Jotan," the man replied promptly and with complete honesty.

"And after that?"

Itak's dark face split in a wide smile. "When we left for Ammad, my mate was heavy with child. I would like to learn if I have a son or a daughter."

Slowly Jotan rose from the log and stretched his long, powerful arms. "We have rested long enough," he said, his face empty of all emotion. "Let us be on our way—back to join our companions!"

Open relief showed in the three warriors' faces. Only Tamar fully understood what those words had cost his friend and he stood up and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. For only a second he left it there and neither spoke.

Then packs were swung to stalwart backs and the five men disappeared among the trees along the narrow game trail leading into the south—and Ammad.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Dylara at the moment the spider-man was placing her roughly on a heap of foul-smelling grasses. In the almost impenetrable darkness she was aware that his hands were moving lingeringly along the contours of her body and in sudden terror she struck out at his face, guided by the sound of hoarse rapid breathing.

Her nails struck home and she raked them fiercely across an unseen cheek, bringing forth a startled cry of pain and anger. An open hand caught her heavily above the ear and once more her senses swam, leaving her weak and defenseless.

Dimly she was aware that the awful creature was dropping to its knees beside her and once more long slender hair-covered fingers tugged at her tunic.

And then there was a startled grunt, a flurry of motion—and she was alone. Even as she started up wonderingly the floor of the swinging hut vibrated sharply under a heavy impact, followed by the sounds of furious struggle.

What it all meant, Dylara did not know. Perhaps one of the other spider-men, jealous of her captor's prize, had come to take her for himself. Or perhaps the spider-man's mate had arrived to protect the sanctity of her home.

Whatever the reason, it was Dylara's chance—and she took it without hesitation. Hugging the walls to keep free of the two battling figures rolling about the floor, she edged her way swiftly toward the small aperture that served as a door, then dropped to her knees and crawled through. At any moment she expected one of those slender hands to close about one of her ankles; but that did not happen and she gained one of the branches outside.

Never in all her life before had the daughter of Majok descended from a tree with such reckless abandon—but never before had she so strong a motive for haste. In fact she slipped and fell the last ten feet, her heart bounding into her throat as she toppled into Stygian blackness.

She was on her feet like a cat, not stopping to learn if the fall had injured her, and ran blindly into the tangled fastness of brush, vine, creeper and tree. Thorns tore at her skin and tunic, brambles tugged painfully at her hair, the stems of bushes tripped her up, trees loomed up too late for her to avoid slamming into them.

But Dylara was impervious to pain and heedless of obstacles. On and on she went, stumbling, running, crawl-

ing—fighting to put distance between her and the ugly monstrosities in those conical, tree-top huts.

How long this mad flight endured or how far it took her Dylara was never to know. But at last overtaxed muscles rebelled, her laboring lungs refused their task, and the cave girl collapsed in a pitiful heap among a tangled maze of head-high bushes.

Twice she sought to rise and go on. But each time her legs turned to water beneath her and she sank back to earth. Tears of utter helplessness flooded her eyes; she put her head down against one arm—and in that instant she fell sound asleep.

When she awakened night had fled and sunlight, pale and without warmth after filtering through layer upon layer of foliage, made visible her immediate surroundings.

SHE got shakily to her feet and stood there swaying a little as outraged muscles reminded her painfully of last night's mad flight. Little lines of dried blood on her arms and legs marked where thorns had raked her and she realized her body was one aching mass of bruises. Added to this was an inflexible stiffness brought on by sleeping on damp earth.

But all this was relatively unimportant. She was free once more—free to begin her long journey back to the cave of her father. She must hasten back to the trail which Jotan and his men had followed from Am-mad and retrace her way southward toward home.

And at that moment the full impact of her predicament came home with stunning force.

She was utterly and completely lost! Whether the trail to Sephar was to the east or west of where she now stood was as unknown to her as the opposite side of Uda, the moon. True her goal lay to the north; but unless she could locate the original path Jotan had followed, she might spend

the rest of her life picking a way through the towering mountains and endless plains between.

Surging panic cut her legs from under her and she dropped into a sitting position on a fallen log and buried her face in her hands. For a long time she sat thus, fighting back her tears, trying to think logically. But what use was logic in this tangled wilderness of growing things?

Still, she told herself, she could not sit there forever, an unresisting morsel for the first meat-eater to come along. She stood up, brushed away an accumulation of leaves, thorns and dirt from her tunic, and struck resolutely out toward the east, pushing her way slowly through the walls of plant life everywhere about her.

Monkeys raced and chattered among the branches overhead and disturbed rodents and the crawling things that infest the rotting jungle floor fled from her path. After a dozen yards she was bathed in perspiration and her skin seemed to crawl with the dampness.

If only she could find some sort of pathway that would allow her to make progress without battling this ocean of pulpy, slimy vegetation—a footing solid enough to prevent sinking to her ankles with every step. Three different times she narrowly avoided trodding on snakes—small, brightly colored reptiles whose bite would have meant a lingering death; and once she nearly collapsed with fright when a looping vine caught her about the neck unexpectedly and she thought it the folds of a python.

And then, after an hour of this, she stumbled unexpectedly into an elephant path, its powdery surface marked by the passage of numerous other animals. Unfortunately for her purpose it ran almost east and west instead of north and after following it into the east for the better part of two hours, it began gradually to veer southward, taking her further and

further from the caves of her father.

Her only hope was that sooner or later she would come upon an intersecting trail that would lead northward. The thought of leaving the narrow strip of open ground and plunging back into that green maze was more than she could endure. And so she went on, staggering now and then under the lashes of heat and weariness, finding an occasional waterhole to quench her thirst and stripping fruit from trees and bushes to satisfy hunger.

Near nightfall she came upon a large clearing through which flowed a wide shallow stream. It had been several hours since last water had passed her lips and sight of the river lifted her spirits. She pushed her way through a heavy growth of reeds on the near bank, knelt and drank thirstily, then slipped out of her tunic and submerged her entire body in the brackish liquid.

Emerging at last, she dried her body with handfuls of grasses, her lithé, sweetly rounded figure gleaming like an image molde'd of pure gold in the fading sunlight. Her spirits were soaring again, for when first leaving the water she had glimpsed the beginnings of a second trail into the forest—a trail pointing straight as a spear shaft toward the north.

Already her plans were made. She would spend the night among the high-flung branches of that tree at the trail's entrance, when dawn came again she would start out once more—this time toward home.

Donning her tunic she ran lightly toward the tree, its base buried among a heavy growth of bushes.

While from the depths of tangled undergrowth near the bole of that tree, a pair of glowing yellow eyes were fixed in an unblinking stare upon the swiftly approaching girl!

* * *

A STORM was blowing up. Tharn, belly flat against a broad branch

while he gnawed the sweet pulpy interior of a hard-shelled fruit, caught the signs of it in the scent of the air, in the uneasy pattern of a shifting breeze, in the faintly yellowish cast of the sky overhead. He mentioned the possibility to Trakor, who, wedged into a fork nearby, was dozing in the heat of day.

"A nice dry cave would come in handy if the rain comes," the youth observed. "I know how Gerdak's warriors hated being caught in a storm. They say the jungle is never more dangerous, with winds blowing branches through the air with the speed of flying spears, great trees being uprooted to crash down and crush the unlucky, while Rora, the lightning, flickers angrily about their heads."

"It is a part of jungle living," Tharn said philosophically. "This one will not come for half a sun yet—if it comes at all. Or it may be only a little storm."

"And if it is a bad one?" Trakor asked.

"Then we find a very big tree that is not too old and stand under it until it passes."

"But sometimes storms last for many suns!"

"Not at this season. The rain may fall for suns on end but then the wind is not too strong and there is no danger in moving about."

This was the sixth day since he and Trakor had set out in sustained pursuit of those Ammadians who were holding Dylara. They traveled mostly during the morning and afternoon hours, laying up during the heat of day. To Trakor every hour brought new confidence, increasing dexterity in tree-top travel and his store of jungle lore, under the expert tutelage of Tharn, increased by leaps and bounds. He could stalk Neela, the zebra, or Bana, the deer, across wide stretches of grasslands and, more often than not, get close enough to this wariest of all prey to bring one down with a

single spear cast. Tharn had spent all of one sun making him a bow, and with it and a handful of arrows from Tharn's own quiver the boy had learned to handle the weapon with some degree of success. No member of the cat family had faced him and his new-found abilities thus far, but the time must eventually come and he looked forward to it with ill-concealed impatience.

But it was in the trees where Trakor excelled. Already he could keep pace with Tharn for short periods, although he was far from being able to match his friend's over-all agility and stamina. Only when it came to racing swiftly through the trees in the blackness of night was he hopelessly outclassed; for here success depended on an uncanny kind of sixth sense that Tharn had managed to develop only by constant practice and use since almost the day he was able to walk.

Nor was Trakor capable of such quick thinking as that displayed by his hero. A sudden development would freeze Trakor momentarily, while Tharn, because of both environment and heredity possessed reflexes that would have put Rora, the lightning, to shame, would already have the situation in hand.

And as the days passed the bond between the two of them increased in strength and permanence. To Trakor, Tharn was even more a god than on that day he had dropped from the skies to save the youth from the fangs of Sadu. He sought to emulate everything about him — his expression, his walk, his way of speaking—even his way of thinking. Almost every word the mighty Cro-Magnard uttered was stored deep within the mind of his worshipping companion, to be secretly mulled over and absorbed. As for Tharn, he admired the boy's boundless enthusiasm, his unflagging desire to master the lore of the jungle, his uncomplaining accept-

ance of hardship and his quiet courage.

To Tharn the jungles and plains of his world made up all he wanted from life. To range far and wide in search of adventure, to match his wits and prowess against its savage denizens, animal and human, had made that life complete. With the advent of Dylara, and love, fresh horizons had opened before his eyes, but not once had he pictured life with her as his mate as closing the door on his previous existence. He would have her, he reasoned, and the jungle too.

BUT with the admission of Trakor still another phase presented itself. Self-sufficient as he had always been, even unto childhood, loneliness was no more than a puzzling word. But now he caught himself thinking of ranging those jungles and plains with a companion—one nearly his own age—and the thought pleased him more than he permitted to show. As the days passed the resolve grew to bring Trakor with him and Dylara back to his own people. Always there would be the three of them—Dylara, Trakor, Tharn, inseparable.

The eddying gusts of wind suddenly brought a strangely familiar scent to Tharn's sensitive nostrils, dispelling his mood of reverie and bringing him instantly upright on the swaying branch.

Trakor, startled by the abrupt move, looked up at him sharply. Tharn was standing with head thrown slightly back, his nostrils quivering, his entire body as motionless as though cut from stone.

"What is it, Tharn?"

Tharn's eyes went to the boy and in them was something that brought Trakor beside him instantly.

"Come," the cave lord said.

Side by side they set off through the trees, following the winding path far below. Tharn was moving swiftly, and when he elected to do so few in

all the jungle could match his pace. Trakor, to his consternation, began to fall steadily behind and he put on a fresh burst of speed, taking chances he ordinarily would never have dreamed of. Despite this, Tharn continued to widen the gap and within minutes the youth lost sight of him altogether.

The passage of both was practically soundless, for that is important for survival in the wild. As a result Trakor was unable to make use of his ears in trailing the other, but as Tharn had continued on above the pathway, it would seem logical that he would continue to do so. He hesitated to call out, for to do so, he thought, would be to confess his lesser ability; besides a cry might serve to warn whatever had excited Tharn's interest.

While far ahead of him now, Tharn raced onward, his face an expressionless mask, his heart thudding with desperate hope.

* * *

FIVE dust-covered, disheveled men moved steadily along a winding game trail, the rays of a noon-day sun pouring down on their tunic-clad backs through rifts in the arching branches overhead. They moved in single file without speaking, almost without thinking, their every energy intent only on cutting down the distance between them and the major portion of their party.

Jotan was at the rear of the column, Tamar and he alternating at holding down this exposed position. The back of the warrior ahead of him was ten or twelve feet distant—a space Jotan almost automatically maintained.

The trail underfoot swerved abruptly to by-pass an especially heavy growth of trees and momentarily Jotan was out of sight of his companions. A dozen more strides and he too would make the turn and rejoin them.

A sudden rustling among the bran-

ches directly overhead caused him to look up in alarm, just as a crushing weight struck full upon his shoulders and drove him to his knees. Steel fingers sought and instantly found a hold on his neck, choking back an instinctive cry for help.

Jotan was a powerful, fully trained warrior, with muscles superior to most of his kind. Yet in the first few seconds of struggle he realized with sinking heart that his strength was as a child's when compared to that of the unseen and silent creature on his back.

A film began to form before his protruding eyes, his senses reeled, his laboring lungs fought for air—then blackness poured into his brain.

... Slowly the fog of unconsciousness left Jotan of Ammad and at last he opened his eyes. At sight of the half-naked man crouched over him instant recognition dawned in his expression. "You!" he gasped.

"I," said Tharn impassively, "Where is she?"

"I do not know."

"You lie!" The cave lord's hand shot out and sank incredibly powerful fingers into the Ammadian's bare arm. "Tell me where she is or I will kill you!"

Jotan raised a shaking hand and massaged the aching muscles of his throat where those mighty fingers had left their mark. He saw now that he was high in the branches of a tree, that sitting on a branch behind his captor was another cave man— a youth, rather—who was watching him from inscrutable eyes.

"She never really believed you were dead," the Ammadian said slowly, almost as though thinking aloud. "I tried to tell her no man comes through the Games of the God alive. Even now I can hardly believe that you are actually here."

Tharn was not to be side-tracked. "Where is she?" he growled. "For the last time—or do I choke the inform-

ation from you?"

"That will not be necessary, my friend," Jotan said sadly. "For all I know Dylara may be dead."

Nothing changed in Tharn's expression but his fingers bit sharply into Jotan's arm bringing an involuntary cry to the Ammadian's lips. "What do you mean?"

Whereupon the young nobleman of Ammad recounted the events of that terrible night when the lions had fallen upon his followers and sent Dylara racing for the safety of the trees. Tharn heard him out, his face as empty of emotion as though carved from granite.

"For three suns," Jotan said in closing, "we searched the jungle for a sign of her. But to no avail. Either the lions got her or she is somewhere to the north, making her way back to the caves of her people. Two suns ago my men and I gave up and we were on our way back to rejoin the rest of our party when you found me."

"Where is this place from which Dylara fled Sadu?"

"A sun's march to the south."

Tharn nodded. "You may return to your friends," he said. "If she is still alive I will find her. If she is dead, or if I find her alive and learn that you have harmed her, I will come back and kill you!"

Jotan shrugged. Not for an instant did he doubt that the young giant meant exactly what he said. Somehow his own life seemed unimportant with Dylara gone. He knew that, alive or dead, Dylara was lost to him and that he would never see her again.

He shook off his thoughts. "Then I am free to go?"

"Yes."

"Where will I find my friends?"

"The trail where I found you is directly below. They have discovered your absence and have backtracked in search of you."

Without another word Jotan rose to his feet and began the long descent groundward.

Once the intervening foliage hid the Ammadian from view, Tharn said to Trakor, "A sun's march to the south," he said. "We should make it in half that time—perhaps less. Come."

Side by side the two Cro-Magnards set off through the leafy reaches of the trees.

* * *

DLARAH, only a few yards from the trail's mouth, came to a sudden halt. Years of elbow rubbing with the jungle and its inhabitants reminded her that trail mouths a short distance from water were where Sadu and Tarlok were most likely to be lying in wait for game. And this was the time of day the meat-eaters began their search for food.

Standing there near the clearing's edge, she peered intently at the waist-high grasses shrouding the boles of trees on both sides of the trail. A light breeze stirred them softly, and at one spot directly beneath a jungle patriarch's broad boughs, a trailing vine swayed in unison with the wind.

But wait! That vine was quivering unsteadily, then moving *against* the breeze! Instantly Dylara's eyes were fixed on that spot. Little by little her searching gaze made out the outlines of some amorphous shape crouching motionless behind a curtain of grasses.

Imagination? Perhaps, she told herself. But the jungle dweller without it soon left his bones to bleach along the trails. Cautiously she took a backward step . . . another, and yet a third.

The long grasses at that point were very still now as the breeze died. Was she being overly careful—running from shadows? A tree stump, a fallen log—any of several explanations would cover that motionless bulk lying there.

Suddenly the brooding silence was

torn apart by a thunderous roar and Sadu, the lion, aware that his prey was on the point of escape, sprang from the depths of foliage and bore down upon her with express-train speed, snarling and growling as he came.

Even as Dylara turned to flee, she knew her life was finished, that nothing could save her now. Any hope that she would reach safety among the trees was futile; the nearest was long yards away and Sadu would have buried his talons and fangs in her defenseless flesh while she was still far short of escape.

Yet so strong was the urge of self-preservation that she was racing like the wind for sanctuary despite the uselessness of flight; while behind her Sadu was cutting down the gap between them as though the Cro-Magnard princess were standing still.

The knowledge that his prey was inescapably doomed did not cause Sadu to loiter along the way or grow over-confident. He judged the intervening space with a practiced eye; and, at precisely the right moment, he launched his great, heavy-maned body in the final Gargantuan leap that would end full in the center of that smoothly tanned back.

It was then that Dylara caught a foot in a tangle of grasses and plunged headlong!

Sadu, soaring in a majestic parabola, overshot his mark and landed a full two yards beyond. Instantly he wheeled to pounce on his dazed prey—and in that instant twelve heavy war-spears tore into his exposed flank!

The combined impact of those dozen flint heads knocked him to the ground. Fountains of blood darkened his shimmering hide; his legs scrambled madly to bring him upright—then he slumped back and moved no more.

Dylara, wide-eyed and shivering, was rising to her feet when a horde of white-tunicked Ammadians hem-

med her in. One of them, a tall, square-shouldered warrior of middle-age, caught one of her arms and helped her up.

Still dazed by her narrow escape from death, Dylara looked about the circle of curious faces. None of these men was familiar, although their dress and appearance told her into whose hands she had fallen.

"Who are you, woman?" demanded the square-shouldered one roughly, "and what are you doing thus far from Ammad?"

She met his stern gaze unflinchingly. "I am Dylara, daughter of Majok, and I do not belong in Ammad. Let me go at once!"

THE man's eyes narrowed speculatively. "What have we here?" he said, an appraising gleam in his eyes. "Your bearing and appearance is that of a nobleman's daughter; your words have the sound of the cave-dwellers. Which are you, anyway?"

Briefly, Dylara weighed her chances of deluding this sharp-eyed man into believing her the daughter of some Ammadian. Even as the thought came to her she realized such a story would never stand up. Either way he would take her to Ammad; and from the expressions of some of those warriors crowding about her and feasting their eyes on her face and figure, she would be better off telling the truth. The mere mention of Jotan's name, while expunging her last hope of being released, would at least save her from possible molestation . . .

"I am the noble Jotan's," she said, thankful that the earnest young man was not around to hear that declaration. "I was accompanying him from Sephar to Ammad when an attack by lions separated us."

The Ammadian leader's expression was one she could not analyze. He said, almost humbly, "Perhaps you are the daughter of some Sepharian noble?"

It might have been wise for her to make such a claim. But strong within this lovely girl was pride of race and a faint contempt for these comparatively frail and dull-witted people.

"No," she said, head held high, "I am not a Sepharian. I am the daughter of Majok, chief of a tribe. I was captured by the Sepharians and I was given to Jotan."

The man's bow was a travesty on humbleness. "It is an honor to meet a slave of the noble Jotan. I am Ekbar, captain of the guard of the noble Vokal. You will find my master one who can properly appreciate such beauty and charm as yours. Come, let us hasten on that you may the quicker become known to him!"

Dylara felt the blood drain from her face. "You fool! Do you think the noble Jotan would allow such to happen? Were your master to lay so much as a hand on me, Jotan would kill him!"

"You think Jotan's slaves mean so much to him?" Ekbar said mockingly.

"I am no slave," Dylara blazed. "I am to be Jotan's mate."

The other's smile broadened. "I'm afraid Jotan is past needing a mate. You see, Jotan is dead!"

CHAPTER IX TRAKOR'S MISTAKE

IT WAS close to nightfall when Tharn and Trakor reached the clearing where Jotan's party had been attacked by lions several nights before. Ashes from the long-dead fires still showed their outlines, tracked now by the hoofs and paws of jungle beasts. An air of desolation seemed to hang above the scene like the miasmic vapors from some foul swamp.

The two Cro-Magnards knelt at the stream and quenched their thirst. For nearly an hour the two young warriors sat side by side on the bank without speaking, while gradually

shadows from the encircling wall of trees stretched farther and farther across the glade. And then with the suddenness peculiar to tropical climes night filled the forest and the voices of hunters and hunted rose and fell about the clearing.

Trakor stirred uneasily as the roar of Sadu, monarch of the jungle night, rolled across the forest aisles from nearby. His ears, far sharper now from constant use, caught a faint stirring among the river reeds a dozen yards from where Tharn and he were seated; and an instant later those rustling stalks parted and Tarlok, the leopard, slunk into the open.

The young man from Gerdak's caves sat very still, hardly daring to breathe, as the lithe, powerfully muscled feline stood clearly revealed in the light of stars. For a long moment the cat stood as motionless as some beautifully carved statue, then gracefully bent its neck to dip the soft furry muzzle into the water.

Trakor felt a cool breeze against his face and knew why Tarlok failed to sense the presence of Tharn and him. What, he wondered, would happen if Siha, the wind, should suddenly reverse its course and bring their scent to Tarlok's sensitive nostril's? Would that terrible engine of destruction spring instantly upon them, rending and tearing before they could give effective battle? It was an interesting problem to weigh, although Trakor felt he could do it far more justice from a seat on some lofty branch.

Tarlok finished slaking his thirst and without an instant's hesitation turned and vanished among the reeds. Trakor listened to the almost inaudible sounds of the cat's passage and felt a little glow of pride. A moon ago he would have mistaken those rustlings as the passage of Siha—if he had heard them at all.

Tharn stirred. "I am hungry!"

"And I!" agreed Trakor, abruptly aware that he had not eaten since

mid-morning.

"Let us find a comfortable branch for the night, then I will hunt food while you wait there."

"Why can't I go with you?" Trakor demanded. "I am a good hunter. Did I not, a sun ago, track down and slay Neela, the zebra, with my own knife?"

"That was while Dyta was high in the sky," Tharn reminded him. "Hunting Neela or Bana at night requires long practice and many disappointments. Tonight I am too hungry to wait."

A towering forest giant offered a secure and comfortable haven for the night; and while Trakor sat there fuming at being left out of things, Tharn swung off into the darkness in search of their dinner.

Less than an hour later he was back, a haunch of venison across one shoulder. Together they squatted on a broad branch and cut strips of the still dripping flesh from Bana's flank. They ate quickly and in silence, Trakor already having adopted the almost taciturn air common among jungle dwellers; and when they were finished, a handful of leaves served each as a napkin.

Not long thereafter both were sleeping soundly on their swaying couch, as indifferent to the cacophony of roars, shrieks and screams making hideous the jungle night as though such sounds did not exist.

THEY dined on the remainder of Bana's haunch shortly after sunrise the following morning. After descending to drink from the stream in the clearing, Tharn set out to explore the former site of Jotan's camp in an effort to pick up Dylara's trail.

Trakor squatted on his haunches and watched the cave lord with wide, wondering eyes. For several minutes Tharn moved slowly about the cleared ground, his powerful body bent low, his unbelievably keen eyes searching every inch of earth. Gradually his

companion began to understand there was nothing aimless in his movements: he was circling in a gradually narrowing spiral toward the exact center of the camp site.

After a while Trakor tired of watching and went back to the river to drink. He was on his way back when a sharp exclamation from his friend caught his attention.

He was amazed to find Tharn on his hands and knees sniffing at the ground. Those nostrils appeared to quiver, to expand and contract, like an animal's when it picks up a fresh spoor.

A prickling sensation tugged at Trakor's scalp. Was it possible that this god-like human could actually scent, and *recognize* that scent, where a man or woman had stood days before? No human nose had any business being that efficient!

Tharn looked up to find him standing there. "She slept here for several hours," he said. On hands and knees he began to move in a straight line across the ground, swerved to one side near the former location of the fires, then on again across the wide ribbon of open ground between the heaps of ashes and the forest's edge. At the base of a large tree, he stood up and beckoned to Trakor.

"Sadu chased her to this tree," he explained, his voice as confident as though he had witnessed the entire proceedings instead of reconstructing them through the mediums of sight and smell. "He did not get her. Come."

Lightly Tharn swung himself into the branches, Trakor close behind him. To the cave lord this was an engaging sport—a sport made more interesting because happiness for him depended on his ability to follow a cold trail.

Here a bit of lint from Dylara's tunic had caught beneath a segment of bark; there a newly budded shoot had been crushed by a naked foot. A speck of green moisture on an ad-

joining branch marked where that same foot had come to rest a little later; and further on a scuffed section of bark, almost too small to be detected, showed where a foot had slipped slightly.

To Tharn, guided by uncanny powers of perception and a woodlore second not even to the beasts themselves, all these marks were as evident and recognizable as words on a printed page to a scholar.

Dylara's progress had been snail-like that night as she worked her way through impenetrable darkness; Tharn moved along her pathway speedily and without faltering, Trakor following.

In ten minutes the cave lord covered the distance Dylara had required an hour to travel. Abruptly he altered his course upward toward the forest top, until, high among the smaller branches, he stopped and looked to his nose for information.

Almost at once Trakor noticed a troubled expression carve itself on Tharn's handsome face. "What is, Tharn?"

His companion's lips set in a narrow line. "I do not know. Some strange manlike creature with long hairy arms and legs surprised her here and carried her away."

Moving slowly now, with many pauses, Tharn set out on the arboreal pathway accompanied by the bewildered Trakor.

FOR nearly three full hours Tharn continued on through the middle terraces. It took him a good part of that time to get some sort of accurate picture of how that strange, hairy creature had regulated its progress. The distance between marks left by its hands and grasping feet seemed far too great for anything other than the most agile of monkeys.

So intent was Tharn on following the spoor, and so intent on Tharn was his companion, that the first indica-

tion either had of danger was when fully a score of spider-like forms engulfed them from the depths of as many hiding places among the foliage.

The first wave swept the still inexperienced Trakor completely from his branch, and he would have fallen headlong through space toward the ground below had not one of the ambushers caught him by an ankle and jerked him roughly back to a different type of danger. In a mad fury that was half rage and half fear the youth struck out blirdly with his knife, killing three of his attackers and wounding several more before he went down beneath the sheer weight of numbers.

It was Tharn who took the subduing! With the first rustle of foliage his knife was in his hand and he met the onslaught of twisting, shrieking spider-men like a rocky crag meets a storm-swept sea. Enemy after enemy toppled into the void, their bodies torn by his keen blade of flint; others went to join them with skulls crushed by superhuman blows or with spines snapped like twigs. Early in the battle Tharn learned it was useless merely to push them from the limb: they would fall a few feet until some long sinuous limb would catch a lower branch and back they would come to the fight.

But the odds were far too unequal, and very slowly they pulled him down, as a pack of dogs will pull down a wide-antlered elk. Thick vines lashed his arms to his sides until he was trussed and helpless.

Then both captives were lifted by the loudly exultant spider-men and borne to a conical shaped hut of grasses hanging by means of a thick rope of that same material from a pair of stout branches above its roof. Here they were thrown roughly to the swaying, bobbing floor on opposite sides of the structure, then left to themselves as the long-limbed spider-men departed.

Trakor waited until he was certain the last of them was gone, then despite his bonds he managed to roll over until he was facing his friend three or four yards away. The cave lord was lying motionless on his side, swathed with strand upon strand of stout vines, his eyes open, his expression as calm and untroubled as though he were comfortably ensconced in his own cave.

"What will they do with us, Tharn?" whispered the youth.

Those broad shoulders moved in a faint shrug. "Who knows?"

It was far from being a satisfactory answer. Trakor was silent for a little while, thinking unhappy thoughts. Through the hut's thin walls came the shrill, unfamiliar chattering of many voices. Evidently the spider-men were holding some kind of a meeting—a meeting, Trakor was sure, concerning the eventual fate of their captives.

"Tharn . . ."

"Yes?"

"Can't we *do* something? Must we lie here like two helpless old men until they get around to k-killing us?"

Tharn caught the slight break in the youth's words and his slow smile disclosed flashing teeth. "They will not kill us for a while—otherwise we would have been dead before this. Perhaps they intend to torture us first—either to enjoy our suffering or to honor their tribal god."

"But now we can do nothing. Four of them are watching our every move through chinks in these walls; our first move toward escape would bring them upon us."

Trakor's eyes roved about the hut's sides. He could see no signs of gleaming eyes peering in on them, but long ago he had learned never to doubt Tharn's ability to know things beyond the evident.

His voice went down. "Can they hear us?"

"Of course," Tharn said. "But that does not mean they can understand

us. We do not speak their tongue, so we need not worry of being overheard."

"But what can we *do*?" Trakor demanded for the second time.

"At present, nothing. There is a way for us to escape but it depends on them leaving us here until Dyta finds his lair for the night."

"And if they don't leave us here until dark?"

Tharn's smile appeared again. "Would you cheat them of their pleasure by worrying yourself to death?"

TRAKOR digested that in silence, seeing the wisdom in his friend's quiet words. He found his fear lessening fast; there was something in Tharn's calm acceptance of their present difficulty that inspired confidence in their eventual escape.

With the waning of his own fear he found room for concern about someone else. "Tharn!" he gasped. "Are these the ones who captured Dylara?"

A somber expression crept into the cave lord's eyes. "I am sure of it."

"Do you think that they have . . . that they . . ." He could not finish.

"After we get away," Tharn said grimly, "I will learn the answer to that. She may be held in another hut at this moment; but if they have slain her . . ."

The rest of the morning and the long afternoon which followed wore on. None of their captors entered the hut to learn how they were faring, although not once were they unobserved from without. During the heat of midday the sound of shrill voices still ed; but along toward evening it started up again.

Tharn's position was such that he could see through the small aperture which served at the hut's doorway. As a result he was able to see a horde of the spider-men begin the construction of a good sized platform of small branches in a neighboring tree. At

first their purpose was not clear to him; but when, shortly before darkness set in, he saw two tall straight branches denuded of vegetation thrust upright, side by side, into the platform, he understood something of what they had in mind. This understanding became certainty a little later when he noticed a score of the female members of the tribe busy at the task of putting sharp points on many long straight sticks, using flint knives for that purpose.

He and Trakor would be bound to those stakes and slowly prodded to death! The all-important question was, would that take place this night or would the spider-men wait until dawn? It hardly seemed logical they would be so tortured without sufficient light for the spider-men to observe their sufferings; and to use fire among the inflammable tree tops would be sheer folly—if indeed these creatures were fire users at all.

Darkness came and still none of the spider-men entered the hut. Both men were suffering the pangs of thirst, but hunger had not yet become a problem. Evidently their hosts had no intentions of pampering them.

Sometime later three of the spider-men crawled into the hut and immediately set about examining the prisoners' thongs. So intense was the darkness now that they had to depend solely on the sense of touch. Satisfied the bonds were intact, the three found places on the floor and presently the sounds of even breathing told all were asleep.

Tharn lay there unmoving while the minutes slipped by and became hours. With the inexhaustible patience of all wild creatures he bided his time, waiting until the sleep of those guards was sound. Several times he heard Trakor stir impatiently and he smiled a little under cover of darkness. Trakor was waiting for a miracle.

The position of the three spider-

men was such that leaving by the door was impossible, even were the prisoners able to gain use of legs and arms. Even if they were able to loose their bonds, a simultaneous attack could account only for two—leaving the third free to raise an alarm.

Slowly, with many pauses lest the jiggling of the flooring arouse those guards, Tharn began to roll himself to Trakor's side. So carefully did he move that almost a full hour had passed before he reached his objective.

He felt the animal heat of the youth's body, and a barely audible word reached his ears. "Tharn?"

"Shhh!"

And then Tharn began to gnaw at Trakor's bonds. His strong sharp teeth bit into those tough green vines, filling his mouth with an unpleasant taste. It was slow, jaw-tiring work and the vines were many, stringy and reluctant to part. But the cave lord's indomitable patience and perseverance were not to be denied.

AT long last Trakor was able to free his hands. He winced as blood began to move again in his veins and minutes passed before he was able to control his hands. His questing fingers found the knots holding Tharn helpless and very soon both men were free to act.

Still lying side by side, Tharn began to whisper instructions. Twice one of the sleeping spider-men stirred and the two Cro-Magnards held their breaths until he had quieted.

When Trakor nodded to indicate Tharn's plan was clear to him, the cave lord rose to his feet and, like a shadowy wraith, moved to the nearest wall. This was a tense moment in the execution of his plan; its entire success depended on how substantial that wall would prove to be.

A brief examination by the means of touch alone told him the hut was constructed by first forming a cage-

like skeleton of fairly thick but pliable boughs, then interlacing the openings with grass. The horizontal "beams" were roughly three feet apart; the roof, as Tharn had earlier been careful to gauge, was something like fifteen feet above the floor at its highest point.

Tharn's original plan had been to force an opening in one of these walls large enough for Trakor and him to wriggle through into the open air. But his ears and nose told him that this hut was practically ringed with patrolling sentries, several of which were perched among branches directly above the hut itself. The minute he and Trakor appeared outside they would be buried under an avalanche of spider-men.

But there was another way—a way daring and imaginative and infinitely dangerous. But in its daring lay the very chances for its success—while danger was so common a phenomenon in jungle life as to rouse little more than indifference among its dwellers.

Using the relatively sturdy skeletal branches foot—and hand—holds Tharn began to climb up that rounded wall. After some eight feet of this the inner side of the conical roof began and the cave lord was hard pressed to cling to the inward sloping surface.

But his steel thews served their purpose, and a moment or two later he had gained the single heavy section of branch at the very point of the roof. Here the thick grass rope which held the entire hut in the air entered from above, its ends tied securely about the cross piece on which Tharn was now perched.

From a hidden pouch in the folds of his loin cloth Tharn took a bit of keen-edged flint: the primitive razor with which he painstakingly scraped each second day his sprouting beard. With this he began to saw through the taut rope holding the hut aloft!

Gradually the straining rope began to part. Once it gave the entire struc-

ture, weighted by its five occupants, would plummet toward the ground nearly a hundred feet below. There were enough intervening branches to break the fall sufficiently to keep them from being dashed to instant death; but for those three sleeping spider-men it would be a mad, whirling journey that, once it ended, would daze them long enough for Tharn and Trakor to break for freedom.

Three strands remained, then two. The entire hut lurched sickly, the final strand parted with an audible snap as Tharn caught frantically at the cross piece, and down went the hut!

It was a mad mixture of crashing sounds, of breaking branches, of shrill screams, of falling and bouncing bodies, of clawing hands and feet. Slithering, scrambling shapes sought to stabilize themselves by attaching themselves to walls, ceiling or roof, but to no avail. Only Trakor, digging his fingers and bare toes desperately into the yielding flooring, and Tharn, wrapped tightly about that cross-piece, were able to hold their positions; while back and forth between them shuffled the three spider-men.

HALFWAY down, one entire wall broke loose, spilling the guards into the void. As the mazes of foliage grew denser nearer the ground, the remains of the hut began to slow its fall, grinding to a complete stop some twenty feet above ground.

Instantly Tharn and Trakor were out of the ruins and racing away through the branches. Behind them they could hear a wild chorus of angry screams, but apparently the spider-men were still too dazed and bewildered to set up a planned pursuit.

An hour later Tharn called a halt. They stood silently on a high branch for a little while, listening for some sign that their late captors had taken up the chase.

"We have thrown them off," Tharn

said finally. "I'll give them a few hours to get over their shock and return to sleep—then I'm going back."

"Going back!" echoed Trakor, agast, "Why?"

"I must learn what they have done with Dylara. Too, my knife, rope and bow and arrows are somewhere within the wreckage of that hut."

"But even you, Tharn, would be helpless against so many," protested Trakor.

Tharn shrugged. "It is the only way," he said, and there was that in his tone which ended further discussion.

They stretched their bodies out on adjoining branches and after a while Trakor fell into a troubled sleep. He awakened with a start, to find the first flush of dawn across the eastern sky and an empty branch where Tharn had been during the night.

He had little time to worry about his companion's absence; for barely had he opened his eyes than a rustling among the foliage of a neighboring tree brought him hastily to his feet in time to see Tharn emerge into view.

Across the caveman's back was his quiver of arrows, his bow and his rope; thrust within the folds of his loin cloth was his flint knife, and across one shoulder was the meaty foreleg of Neela, the zebra. This last he thrust into Trakor's dazed hands.

"Fill your belly," he said, grinning at the youth's slack-jawed expression. "We have work to do."

"But—But—"

"It was easy," Tharn said, "but only because I was very fortunate. When I got there they were not sleeping; for the commotion I doubt that they will sleep for a long time. While waiting for an opportunity to climb among their huts to hunt for Dylara, I set out to get back my weapons. The knife and rope were still in the broken hut and I found them at once. But I was forced to hunt about under the

trees for my arrows and bow—and a good thing it was!"

"Why do you say that?"

"I came across Dylara's trail. It seem - - -"

"In the *dark*? How could you *see*?"

Tharn tapped his nose and smiled as understanding dawned in his young friend's eyes. "It seems," he continued, "that she managed to get away from them just a little while ago, for her scent spoor was still fresh. I followed it far enough to learn that she found a game trail leading into the east which she followed. It is not far from here; feed, and we will set out to overtake her."

EARLY that afternoon Tharn and Trakor were swinging lightly through the trees above a winding elephant path cutting almost due south through the jungle. Even from his elevated position Tharn was able to make out an occasional print of a sandal in the powdery dust below. Dylara had left those marks—left them so recently that the passing feet of animals had not yet obliterated them.

The thought of her nearness brought an almost painful sensation of swelling deep within his chest and a strange ache at his wrists. The realization that he might soon be holding her within the circle of his arms, that his lips would be pressed against hers before another sun or two, made him eager to race madly ahead, outdistancing his slower companion.

But would she be as moved at sight of him? He recalled words spoken by her on those two brief occasions they had been together—first when he had wrested her from the caves of her father and taken her deep within the jungle. How her eyes had blazed with loathing! How her voice had rung out with hatred and disdain. "I hate you!" she had said; nor did she retract those words days later when, at the last pos-

sible instant, he had slain Sadu to save her life.*

True, when Sadu sank lifeless to the ground between them, she had thrown herself into his arms, and the warm promise of her lips had crystallized forever within him his love for her. But that impulsive act might have been born of gratitude alone; he had been given no opportunity to find out one way or the other; for Jotan and seven of his men had arrived at that moment to take her from him.

Love, Tharn had long before decided, was a wonderful and annoying thing, bringing, as it did, both pleasure and torture, peace and unrest. All his wondering, all his doubts were for nothing until he could come face to face again with Dylara. And even then he might not know her answer; she would welcome him, of course, for in him alone was her sole hope of returning to her people.

But he did not want her to return to her own caves! She must go with him to his tribe—and go she must, with or without her own consent!

The winding trail below ended suddenly at the edge of an extensive clearing, through which ran a wide shallow sluggish river. From deep among a thick growth of reeds on the latter's opposite shore came a spintingling chorus of snarls and growls and the sounds of jaws grinding against bones.

Tharn seemed literally to fall the fifty or sixty feet between his elevated position and the ground below. The density of that growth of reeds kept him from seeing what animals were feeding there and the wind at his back left his nose useless in obtaining that information. Yet he charged in that direction with all the silent ferocity of Sadu himself, a swelling fear within him that it was Dylara's soft flesh which was furnishing those un-

*"Warrior of the Dawn," December, 1942-January, 1943, *Amazing Stories*.—Ed.

seen beasts with their dinner.

KNIFE in hand, lips curled back in a savage snarl, the cave lord tore his way through the tangled growth. With the first sounds of his passage, that chorus of growls ceased, and Tharn knew those unseen jungle dwellers were prepared to defend their kill.

Without slackening his pace he burst full upon a pack of hyenas surrounding the half-devoured carcass of Sadu, the lion. Snarling and spitting their rage they held ground, evil teeth bared, the hair standing stiff along their spines, ready to give battle; for, in numbers, cowardly Gubo was a force to be reckoned with.

An instant later three of them lay dead and the rest fleeing wildly into the surrounding jungle, while Tharn restored his bloody knife to its place in the folds of his loin-cloth and knelt beside Sadu's remains.

Trakor arrived on the scene while Tharn was completing his examination. Wide-eyed he stared at the lion and then at the stern face of his companion. He said, "What happened to Sadu, Tharn? Surely Gubo did not kill him?"

The cave lord shook his head. "Sadu died under many Ammadian spears."

"Ammadian?" repeated Trakor, astonished. "Not those who were hunting for Dylara?"

"I am not sure—yet."

Tharn rose and began to circle slowly that section of the clearing adjacent to Sadu's remains. Trakor watched him, fascinated, as he scrutinized the trampled grasses in an effort to piece together details of what had taken place. Twice he knelt and placed his nostrils close to the ground, the last time remaining in that position for several minutes.

Finally he straightened and beckoned to Trakor. "They have her," he said tonelessly. "She was fleeing from Sadu. Their spears cut him down in

time, then they took her with them. There are many of them—at least fifty—and they are none I have come across before. Evidently we are very near to Ammad."

"How far are they ahead of us?"

"A sun's march—if that."

"What do we do now, Tharn?"

"Overtake them, of course—and take Dylara from them."

He said this last with a crisp decisiveness that left no room for doubt. But Trakor was shaking his head.

"There are fifty of them, Tharn. How can two of us fight so many?"

"There are other ways than by fighting. First we must catch up with them; then we will work out a way to get her."

THE swift journey through the jungle that afternoon was something Trakor was never to forget. As though driven by some overpowering urge, Tharn raced southward through the middle terraces with astonishing speed. Trakor sought manfully to match his pace, but time and again the cave lord left him behind, only to hold up on some high flung branch until his younger companion could close the gap. Twice Tharn stopped for rest periods—not because his own iron physique needed them, but to prevent Trakor from collapsing entirely. The realization was galling to the youngster, and it brought home forcibly to him that, for all his rapid progress in jungle lore and jungle living since Tharn had adopted him, he was still as a new-born child compared to Tharn.

And while Tharn fretted at thus being forced to slow his pace, he kept his impatience from showing by expression or word. Paradoxically he had spent almost a moon in teaching his companion the ways of the forest and its inhabitants without progressing along the trail to Ammad, but Dylara was a comparatively long way ahead at that time. Now that she was

within a few hours of him, even an instant's delay galled him.

Night came with the abruptness peculiar to this part of the world, and still the winding elephant trail below showed no signs of the Ammadians. Lack of light slowed Trakor to a comparative crawl, and while from time to time he urged Tharn to go on without waiting for him, the cave lord only shook his head.

And then, two hours after Dyta had sought his lair for the night, a faint glow against the southern sky marked the location of fire. This could have meant the most dread of all jungle perils—a forest fire; but the glow seemed too small and much too localized for that.

"The Ammadian night fires," Tharn said in reply to his friend's question. "Doubtless they have camped in some clearing along the way and have made a circle of fire to keep Sadu and Jalok at bay."

Not long thereafter the two Cro-Magnon men came to a halt high in the branches of a great tree. Below and before them was a wide clearing, in the center of which a host of white-tunicked men squatted about small

cooking fires. The savory odors of freshly grilled meat rose on the air and Trakor felt his mouth water. Food had not passed his lips since that morning and traveling, he realized, made for large appetites.

The entire encampment was girded by windrows of blazing branches and thorn bushes under constant attendance by several of the Ammadian warriors. Spears, knives, bows and arrows were much in evidence, and there was that atmosphere of relaxed competence about the entire scene that indicated beyond doubt these were seasoned veterans who knew the jungle and its ways.

But of it all nothing existed for Tharn beyond a slenderly rounded white-tunicked figure seated in the company of several warriors about a cooking fire almost exactly in the center of the camp. At sight of that wealth of reddish gold hair and the sweet curve of a tanned cheek, he knew his search was over, that the girl he loved was almost within his reach. A burning impulse bade him throw caution to the winds and charge among those hated Ammadians and wrest her from them.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

PURIFICATION BY WATER AND FIRE

★ By AUGUST BLACK ★

GREAT cleansing powers have been attributed to water, especially water of rivers and seas. Water into which hot coals have been plunged was considered by magicians as a sovereign remedy against the evil eye. The belief in the power of water gave rise to the myth that fish are always in good health and immune to earthly diseases. From this idea came the practice of bathing babies and corpses and throwing the water away immediately because it contained dangerous magic forces. The water of the River Jordan was believed to have the power to cure leprosy, and in India it was the custom to bathe in the Ganges or pour water from that river over the infected parts. The washing of the Arabs before entering a mosque, and the purification of Egyptian priests, stems from the same origin.

From the realization of the protective powers of fire and light, which kept away wild animals and was beneficial to the body, came the idea of purification by the use of fire. Burning torches were used according to the ritual tables of the ancient Babylonians, Spartans, and Persians. Armies were preceded by firebearers; during childbirth and after death, the ceremonies were accompanied by the lighting of fires. The idea of purification by passing through fire came from this concept. The ancient Roman Dea Candelitera was the candle-bearing goddess whose duty it was to protect the new-born child from the evil spirits that always hovered nearby waiting for a chance to enter its body. Torches were used at weddings, funerals, and at the entrances of tombs to discourage the attentions of the evil spirits.

OOGIE FINDS LOVE

by Berkeley Livingston

It took a fierce battle with the pre-historic Cro-Magnons, and a modern wrestling match with the Russian Bear, before Oogie, the Caveman, finally won beautiful Sala for his woman



KILL him . . .!" "Moider 'im . . .!" "Tear his arm off!" The cries and shrieks and boos and confusion were general throughout the auditorium, and the tenor of them was about the same, that the Russian Bear should be annihilated. Alas for the public's pleas. Oogie the Caveman was underneath, and already the referee was on his knees, his head bent almost to the canvas, his nose almost touching the

muscled shoulder of Oogie who was underneath the Russian Bear. The two wrestlers were almost in the center of the ring and the nearest of the spectators was some eight feet off. The front row could see the lips of the ref moving but none could hear the words, nor even imagine. For what the ref said, was:

"Boss wants to see you after the match . . ."



From the caves men appeared, dragging after them the women who had been clubbed into submission

Oogie rolled a face toward the ref upon which was writ the tortures of the damned, and blinked his right eyelid. Then the ref slapped the Russian Bear on the shoulder and the match was over . . .

" . . . Hi boss," Algernon Allerdyce called in greeting. His nose sniffed appreciatively at the aroma of coffee.

"Hi Oogie," Sam Grogan replied without turning from what he was doing, lifting the cover of the percolator on the electric plate. "Squat Oog," he directed. "This is just about done. Be with you . . ."

The fragrant aroma of Mocha, Java and Brazilian coffee beans, ground, mixed and blended until they had achieved a perfect harmony, perfumed the air. Two cups, saucers and spoons lay on the desk. Beside them was a bottle of brandy. Oogie and Sam shared the same vice, *coffee*.

Sam did the honors, and after both men sniffed with the deepest delight of the brew, he leaned back in his chair and regarded the muscular man at his side with both affection and speculation. After all, Algernon Allerdyce, known to the wrestling public as Oogie the Caveman, had been Sam's own discovery, and he was proud of it.

A flashback of memory brought a clear picture to Sam's mind: A huge bulk of a man whose face could have served as a model for the drawing of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, entering his offices at the old Hippodrome Building. The wonder he felt at the gentleness of the voice, as the stranger asked:

"Sam Grogan?" And at Sam's nod, "I'm here in answer to the ad you had placed in the *Sun* . . ."

That had been the beginning of a strange and very profitable friendship. For Grogan had advertised for wrestlers and Allerdyce had been the first of those to answer. It was Sam who gave him the name of Oogie the Caveman. As such he had achieved fame around the wrestling circuits, fame and fortune. Sam had learned many facts in the life of Allerdyce during the three years of their association. How when Allerdyce was fifteen a truck had struck the bike he was riding and hurled the unfortunate boy into a tree which mashed his face to a pulp. How the family had brought the injured youth to a famous plastic surgeon who had performed surgery on him. The next day it was found the surgeon was insane, and had been insane when he performed the plastic work on the boy. The result was the ape-like face he had given him.

" . . . Oogie," Sam said from the depth of his introspection, "I've got news for you . . ."

Allerdyce took another appreciative sip of the brew before bending his attention to the other. And then it was only with lifted brow and questioning eyes.

" . . . The Big Deal we've been waiting for is on the fire," Sam said.

"At last, eh?" Allerdyce said. "Yep! The big clean-up! A hundred grand guarantee plus a percentage. It will mean at least two hundred thousand for you . . ."

Allerdyce's lips twisted in a smile though to the casual observer, those lips seemed to snarl. "I can't say I won't be glad that this long grind is over. Three years of this fakery is enough to try the soul of a saint. But now that the

goal is in sight I can only feel a sort of fear that maybe . . . ”

Grogan knew what the other meant. For on that afternoon, long, long gone, Allerdyce had told him why he had answered the ad. It was to achieve enough money to permit the building of a dream, a laboratory of research in plastics. For Algernon Allerdyce had graduated *cum laude* from one of the finest technical schools in the country, his heart set on research, but with his goal closed to him because of his fearsome appearance. He had tried time and again to enter any of the phases of his calling but after the first interview there had never been a second. Sam Grogan had shown him how enough money could be made at wrestling to do what he wanted to. Allerdyce had not always been Oogie the Caveman. Once he had been billed as The Gentleman Grunter, but laughter had only greeted his appearance. As Oogie, he looked the part and the fans had never failed him.

“So don’t go soft now!” Grogan said sharply. It’s in the bag, kid. . . .”

ALLERDYCE leaned back and the chair creaked loudly at the unexpected movement.

“What’s the set-up, Sam?” he asked.

“The whole troupe goes; the Bear, the Irishman, the Masked Marvel and all the others. London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow . . . Yep, Oog, all eighteen of us on the European circuit . . . Hey! What’s wrong?”

Grogan had observed the darkening thunderhead of a frown on the wrestler’s forehead.

“Sam, this may sound a bit childish because the whole thing

is childish, but I don’t like Ed Finster . . . Now wait! I know we’ve been packing them in with our act, the Russian Bear and Oogie the Caveman. But Ed’s been taking the deal a little more seriously than it warrants. Like tonight. He threw a double hammer on me and *really* used pressure. Nor was tonight the first time.

“A week ago in Omaha he almost tore my ears off with a headlock . . . ”

Sam Grogan beamed. Allerdyce didn’t know it but Sam had been the motivating force behind the grudge which had developed between the two men. Finster had complained one night that the public didn’t like him, said that the name he had been given made them mad. Sam had mentioned the name was Oogie’s idea. Finster then took personal exception to it and made a personal issue out of it. So the grudge begun in jest developed until it was noticeable to the rest of the troupe.

Grogan chuckled and in a few words made clear how the thing started. But the smile was wiped from his lips at Allerdyce’s words:

“Too late now, Sam. I’d just as soon forget it but not Ed. He’s got that excuse for a brain thinking the whole thing is real. I’d suggest you get to work on him before it’s too late altogether . . . ”

“That bad, huh? Maybe I’d better straighten the yuk out . . . ”

FLIGHT 243 was well out over the Atlantic, thirty thousand feet below. The super-cruiser *Orion* of the *TWP* lines held a full complement of passengers among whom was the wrestling circus of Sam Grogan and his partner Algernon Allerdyce, more affection-

ately known to the wrestling public as Oogie the Caveman.

The hour was for sleep and everyone but two were observing it. These two, Allerdyce and Finster, were in the lounge, playing gin. Finster had challenged Allerdyce to a couple of games to pass the time. But those two games had long been played. Finster played a wild and woolly game, never remembering discards, or trying knocks when they would be to his advantage, but always playing for gin. So it was that Allerdyce had won almost every game. And since they were playing for a cent a point, Finster was out money. That was why they were still playing while the rest had gone to bed.

"... I'll knock with two, Ed," Allerdyce said.

"Now why the hell didn't you give that ten!" Finster yelled. He held up the discard and looked at it with savage eyes. "That would have ginned me . . ."

Allerdyce shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"That's what I figured. Well, Ed, let's call it quits, huh?"

"Sure! Call it quits when you got me stuck for dough. But that's the way you operate. Why you yellah . . ."

It was at that instant the horror descended on the *Orion*. There was a screaming cacophonous whirlwind of sound, a shriek of metal parting, flames suddenly bursting into full bloom, and the thin voices of men and women in mortal fear. Above all there was a *whooshing* noise, as though a giant hand was gripping them. Finster and Allerdyce felt themselves lifted from the depths of the ship and plunged into a maelstrom of storm in space.

For a full ten seconds Algernon Allerdyce looked into the face of terror beyond words, then unconsciousness descended on him. . . .

* * *

THE air was hot and damp and the slight breeze which fanned his cheek was of little solace. Allerdyce turned his head from side to side; a quiver stirred the heavy frame of his body, and awareness came in a rush to him as he opened his eyes. He sat erect and looked about him.

A figure lay sprawled on the ground some ten feet away. It was that of a man and one glance showed Allerdyce that the man was Ed Finster and that he was alive, though not yet conscious. Allerdyce rose to his feet and grunted at the effort. It seemed as if every bone and muscle creaked and groaned in protest. Awe and amazement made his brows lift and his eyes widen as he looked about. The two men had fallen among some ferns in a shallow glade bound about by dense jungle growth. Allerdyce caught a glimpse of hills in the near distance. Then he saw Finster stir and he stepped to the other's side.

"Wha-what happened?" Finster asked while he turned his head from one side to the other.

"I don't know exactly," Allerdyce replied in a low voice. "But I'm going to make a guess, fantastic as it may sound. I think we fell or were sucked into a space fault. From the looks of this jungle and from the feel of the atmosphere, I'll bet we've landed in a time long before the dawn of men such as we know . . ."

And as though in corroboration there came to their ears a low, grunting sound. Instantly Finster

leaped to his feet and jumped the several feet to the side of the other. The sharp movement brought another coughing grunt, this time from the opposite side. And as they watched, a huge striped shape stepped into the open from the depths of the thick jungle growth. It was fully ten feet long and high as their shoulders, and the head of it was that of a tiger but such as they had never seen, for twin tusks, a foot long protruded down the length of the jowls . . .

"A saber tooth!" Allerdyce whispered hoarsely.

Ed Finster could only stare in open-mouthed horror at the thing. His muscled jaws began to quiver as the tiger began a sinuous advance toward them, and then, as the animal suddenly crouched in preparation for its leap, Finster screamed.

But the tiger never moved from his crouch. As if by magic a half dozen spears pierced its sides and two found a resting place in the tiger's throat. Then the silence was broken by the hoarse shouts of human voices, and a dozen men leaped into the glade and advanced on the two.

"Cro-Magnons," Allerdyce said aloud.

They were tall, broad-shouldered, deep of chest and long of limb. The skins of wild animals covered their nakedness. Their faces showed intelligence, though it was all too apparent that it was limited. But whatever speculations about their origin was in Allerdyce's mind, were wiped from it by their attitudes. They were definitely hostile. Most of them were armed with spears, as if those they had hurled were just one of a number they carried. Those who bore

no spears, held clubs from the heads of which wooden spikes stuck out in vicious fingers of anger.

A LLERDYCE acted from instinct. His right hand shot up to the height of his head and stuck out in front of his face. At that the advancing cavemen stopped and looked at each other. There were gutteral sounds of consultation, then the largest most-fearsome stepped forward and moved toward the two until he was at arm's length.

"Who are you?" he asked. "What do you here in the land of Ugg the Mighty? From whence come you?"

Allerdyce's mind worked at lightning speed. The solution to their problem lay in but a single direction, whatever their position. He looked up to the cloudless, sun-scorched sky and said:

"From the Great Spirit we come. For see . . . are we not different than you? So we were sent to look into the affairs of the Great Spirit's children . . ."

The caveman knitted his brows, shook his head in wonder, then, as a child does at an elder's invitation to inspect a doll, he stepped forward and fingered the suiting of the two men. Little clucking sounds came from the lips as he did so. Then whirling, he shouted:

"The Great Spirit has sent them! Let us do them honor . . ."

At the same time Allerdyce whispered, "Don't act scared," to Finster.

Their leader's words were as a signal for the rest. They came forward in dancing steps, raising their spears and clubs on high and

shouting gleefully words of exultation and praise of their leader Ugg. They surrounded the two strangers and after their leader stepped in the lead they started on a march through the brush. The way seemed endless and after a while Allerdyce shed his upper garments, leaving only his trousers to cover him. Finster followed suit. Oddly, there was a complete absence of insect life.

The way led straight toward the hills they had glimpsed. The wall of jungle ended with startling abruptness and they entered on a rolling plain which after a while became more and more rocky as the upland sweep began. Quite suddenly Ugg stopped, his head tilting to one side in a listening attitude and one hand held in warning.

The others, with the two strangers in their midst, crowded close. "Sobar!" Ugg grunted hoarsely. "He is after our young and women. Listen . . ."

They heard it then, shouts and screams from up above. But what was going on was hidden from them. Ahead lay a narrow cleft between two sides of sheer rock some fifty feet high. The way on the right was clear though at a strong angle. Ugg motioned for Allerdyce to follow and the two climbed to the top of the rock where they lay on their bellies and looked slightly downward at the scene. Ahead were some dozen caves and a common compound. Men were struggling here and there but for the most part those were few. The screams came from the caves. In a matter of seconds men appeared, dragging after them the women and some children. When a woman failed to go along too readily or

when one of the men lost his patience, the club was used. Ugg nudged Allerdyce and motioned with a silent shake of the head for them to return.

" . . . It is the tribe of Sobar," Ugg explained to his men. "They must have learned I sent my son, Ugg the Younger, on a hunting expedition with most of the tribe and that we few went on the hunt for the saber-tooth. They are too many for us . . . "

"But they must come through the cleft in the rock," Allerdyce said. "We can lie in wait for them. Hidden, they cannot know how many we are and when the spears are thrown they will think they have been ambushed."

"But there are only the few of us," Ugg objected.

"Even a few will be enough."

But Ugg had an even better idea:

"They will not fear us. But the Spirits . . . They will run from you after they see how little their weapons do against you . . . "

Now we're in for it, Allerdyce thought. Right in the middle. If we don't, these boys will let us have it. If we do, the others will. And what is worse we can't ask for weapons . . . H'm! Maybe . . . An idea had come to him, a silly idea. Yet if it succeeded . . .

"Come on, Ed," he said, turning to Finster. "Follow my lead, fellah. Otherwise . . ."

He didn't have to finish. The other understood.

ALLERDYCE felt the quiver in his legs and arms as they reached the top of the cleft. One look and he saw the enemy tribe was about to descend. They saw the two men at the same time.

For a long moment the modern and the prehistoric stared at each other. It was the modern who made the first move:

"Men of Sobar!" Allerdyce shouted. "Hear me!"

There were a full fifty of them. Three of them stepped forward, spears held ready for the throwing. One of them was a giant of a man, a full seven feet tall and wide as a barn door.

"Who calls Sobar," the giant asked.

"I do," Allerdyce replied. "The messenger of the Great Spirit . . ." He hoped Sobar knew of this Great Spirit. "He has sent me because Sobar has displeased him . . ."

For a few seconds silence reigned. Then the giant stepped forward a few more steps, and his brow tight in a scowl of anger, asked:

"I do not believe you. You look like one of the swamp people, face of an ape . . ."

Allerdyce felt the brittle coldness of a terrible anger sweep through him. He had been called ape before. And always the one who had done the calling had suffered for his temerity. But mixed with his anger was the knowledge that death could be the result of an unwise move or word. Yet time was not on his side, for Sobar was taking the initiative and was stepping even closer and behind him the other two were also coming toward him in imitation of their leader.

"Hold!" Allerdyce suddenly called in a ringing, imperative voice. "You do not believe me, then, eh? A test, Sobar . . .?"

The other was silent, waiting for the stranger to continue.

"Drop your weapon," Allerdyce said. "You and I, unarmed, to the death . . ."

Then gone was the scowl, gone the furrowed brow. Here was meat to Sobar's liking. Here was something he was not frightened of. Spirit or man, Sobar was not afraid of combat of arms. Flinging the spear to one side Sobar motioned for the other to come to him.

Allerdyce made a feint to come in low but the other merely waited, arms wide, legs spread, and body shifting from the waist. Once again Allerdyce feinted, and as Sobar's body shifted to the side the other seemed to want to come from, Allerdyce leaped forward and grabbed Sobar by his right wrist and using the hand as a lever pivoted on it until he was behind the giant. Then Allerdyce began to exert pressure in a hammerlock.

All the while he had been moving the giant had been still, as if confused. But as pain came in a rush to his shoulder blade, he moved. Never had Allerdyce felt such strength. For though the wrestler was using all his strength on the grip, Sobar broke it with one gigantic movement of his huge body.

Allerdyce knew then that the rules of fair play were out. This prehistoric baby was dynamite . . . Allerdyce staggered away from the other but recovered quickly as the giant came in, both arms outstretched. And once again Allerdyce grasped one of those huge wrists. Only it was in a judo grip this time, a grip where when a man tries to break it, pressure simply multiplies until either the arm

breaks or one cries quits. In this case Sobar waited too long.

EVEN as his face contorted in pain Allerdyce whipped around to one side and delivered a blow with the side of his palm to the side of Sobar's neck. The crack of the breaking neck was like that of a branch breaking. Sobar pitched to his face and lay still.

Instantly Ugg leaped to Allerdyce's side.

"Your chieftain was bested in fair play!" he shouted to the warriors of Sobar's tribe. "By our laws you have now become our prisoners."

"But not by mine!" a strange voice yelled.

And before Allerdyce could do more than turn, Finster was on him. What made Ed Finster do what he did was never explained. Perhaps the realization of what had happened came to the man. Perhaps his mind, twisted by jealousy and hate snapped at that moment. Whatever the reason, he turned on Allerdyce. It was the signal for a general battle. For of all the cavemen who were present, only one was quick-witted enough to take advantage of the situation. This one was one of the two who had come forward with Sobar.

He yelled:

"Gomar is now chief. One of the Spirits is on our side . . . Kill Ugg and his . . ."

Had it been one of the cavemen attacking, Allerdyce would have managed to get away for the moment he needed to recover. But it wasn't. It was a trained wrestler, one who knew all the tricks, who had leaped at him. So Fin-

ster worked his surprise vantage for all it was worth.

But even then Allerdyce might have won out had it not been for Gomar's call to arms. His men forgot the booty they had taken, the women and children and leaped forward with savage shouts, spears and clubs used indiscriminately. Allerdyce had broken Finster's first hold, and was turning to get a grip on the other, when a club thrown by one of the cavemen caught him a blow on the temple and stretched him senseless to the ground.

• • •

ALLERDYCE'S awakening this time was not as pleasant as before. Someone was kicking him in the face. He opened his eyes, one of them anyway. The other was closed shut. He was in a cave. It was a smelly cave, the walls blackened from the smoke of many fires. Nor was he alone. He tried to move his arms and discovered he had been securely bound. Suddenly from behind, a foot came swinging out and pain shot up the side of his jaw as the bare toes connected with it.

"Enough," a voice called.

"Aah! I've been wanting to do this for a long time," Ed Finster said.

There was disgust in Gomar's voice as he replied:

"The Great Spirit has small men for messengers . . . Remove the other's bonds."

"Hey!" Finster yelped in protest.

But no one paid attention. Hands tore the fibre ropes loose from about Allerdyce's figure and helped him to his feet where he stood swaying like a tree in a high wind.

"The Great Spirit sent two

messengers," Gomar said. "But He had a reason. One was sent to conquer Sobar so that I could become chief. The other was to conquer you. The light is clear . . . Take him to the women . . ."

Only Finster laughed at the edict. He had reason for the laughter. In all the years of their association Allerdyce had never been known to go for the fillies. And now he was to be thrown to a pack of them. With that puss, Finster thought, they'd throw him right back.

Spear points pressed against his back, a rope around his wrists, and while the rest walked behind, one man led Allerdyce from the cave into the open, across a level stretch of ground and into a very large cave. Here his wrists were unbound and to the jibes and laughter of the warriors who had accompanied him, Allerdyce was shoved into the cave proper itself.

The cave was immense, and seemed to be filled entirely with women and children. For a second there was silence. Then as their eyes saw this almost naked stranger, a wild shriek of laughter went up. Hands went out, pointing to his shorts which seemed to be all the clothing he had, to his face, puffed into a gargoyleish mask, and to his hairy chest, which looked like the stuffing of a mattress.

Allerdyce stared in horror at the women, turned and started for the cave entrance. But the cavemen had anticipated his move. They stood guard, spears thrust point forward, and after a few hesitant seconds, Allerdyce turned back.

But now they were no longer scattered about the cave. They came over in a rush, forcing him to the wall, his hands pawing in

futile attempts to prevent them from touching him. For some reason this made them angry. Their hands clenched and spiteful words came from their lips, and several turned aside and called something to the children, who after a moment returned, with stones and sticks.

"Hey!" Allerdyce called in alarm. "Take it easy . . ."

The alarm in his voice was the signal for them to attack. In a moment he was the center of a mob of women all bent, it seemed, on his destruction. He fought at first as gently as he could. But as some of the stones hit and some of the clubs struck vulnerable parts of his anatomy, he fought with less gentleness. Finally, he was forced to club one of the women with his fist. She went flying backward and landed flat on her back.

INSTANTLY the attack ceased.

He watched them move away from him and wondered why. His question was answered as the woman he had struck crawled to him and embraced his legs. He tried to withdraw her hands but she held only tighter and said:

"We are mated. You made the choice. I am Sala . . ."

"You're nuts!" Allerdyce said sharply. He turned to call the guards to help him with the woman when he discovered that they were gone.

"Are customs different in your tribe?" Sala asked. "Do you not mate with a woman in this manner?"

The beginning of a hope came to him in a rush as he realized the consequences of what had happened. He was free now. He tried

to put the proper authority in his voice, when he said:

"Go woman! Find me a corner and bring me food . . ."

Without the slightest hesitation Sala rose and trotted to a far corner of the cave. Allerdyce followed and squatted beside her. He had always been a shy man and had never known many women, especially women with as little clothes as Sala wore. She was beautiful by any standard he thought. But only for a moment. His thoughts for the first time centered on his predicament.

His mind allowed for but a single conclusion. That the plane had run into a time-fault and that he and Ed Finster had been drawn into it. The others must have died in the plane crash. Since the giant ship was over the Atlantic at the time of the crash it was reasonable to assume that time only was involved and not space. Therefore, by the same line of reasoning, he and Ed were to be here for the rest of their lives. That is unless somehow they found the same fault again. But that was not probable, he realized.

For a moment fear lay heavy on him. Then the scientist came uppermost. What an opportunity he had. A man of science among these children. The chance to build a civilization. It could be done with his knowledge. But first he had to get the power over these people.

Sala came back just then with what looked like the leg of a rabbit. It was very underdone but Allerdyce didn't quibble. If he were going to live as they did then he might as well start right there.

THREE days went by and nothing changed. He learned all

about his mate. She had been one of Ugg's tribe. Now she was part of the tribe of Gomar. It was that simple. She was a tigress when she thought another woman was even looking at her mate and fought with the savagery of a beast for him. And he had been granted his freedom with his acquisition of a mate. He learned to hunt as the others did, with spear and club. But already he had fashioned his first bow and arrow, and knew it would be a matter of time before he was taught the rest. There was but one fly in the ointment, Ed Finster. As yet he had no mate. And he looked with avaricious eyes on Sala.

It was on the fourth day.

Allerdyce had returned from the hunt. He had killed an animal with his arrow and the tribe looked on him with respect. As he neared his cave he heard shrieks of pain and anger. And as he watched with amazement, Ed Finster appeared, dragging Sala by her hair. His action was instinctive. Rushing forward, he threw his bow to one side and knocked Ed to the ground.

Immediately a circle of warriors were drawn about the two men and Gomar stepped forward.

"It is time," he said. "I have wondered about this. A combat of arms will settle it. Whoever wins will have the woman . . . and his freedom."

As they stood facing each other, Finster turned aside as though to say something to Gomar. Allerdyce relaxed naturally. But Finster had done it with that view in mind. Like a flash he whirled on Allerdyce and grabbed a headlock. It would have ended right then had not both men been barefoot. For

Allerdyce had not stiffened his neck muscles. But Finster stepped on a thorn and the shock made him loosen his grip for an instant. It was enough for Allerdyce to break free.

There were no more surprises.

Bit by bit Allerdyce wore the other down. At last he straddled Finster, who lay face down on the ground. Then Allerdyce grabbed the other by the shock of black hair, pulled his neck up until he could get his arm under it. Then slowly, using all his strength, Allerdyce pulled back until after a moment there was a sharp crack. Finster would be no more trouble.

Algernon Allerdyce rose and

throwing his head back let out a bellow of triumph, and knew then he was no longer Algernon Allerdyce. He was in fact Oogie the Caveman, replete with wife. For Sala had been the first to rush to his side. And as he threw his arms around her he knew love had come to him. She was his and woe betide the one who tried to take her from him.

But when Gomar stepped to his side and asked:

"This sliver of wood you made and the bow of elk thong . . . Could you make another for me . . . ? Oogie the Caveman knew his life had begun in earnest . . .

THE END

DAY OF THE DRUID

(Concluded from Page 136)

BUT that man was Gaar. Slowly his legs straightened, his shoulders went back. All the power that was in his mighty frame went into the thrust. It was a power that would not be denied.

A pillar swayed, tottered, and was ripped out of the earth. Gaar felt himself falling and twisted catlike in the air to land on his feet.

He whirled to meet the charge of the Druids. Cyngled's hands still traced the air but his power was gone. The Norsemen exploded into life again, their swords whirring a song of death. Only Cyngled did not lose his head. Defeated the Druids were, and defeated forever, but he could snatch some measure of victory from the defeat. He was at Marna's side when Gaar reached him.

One great hand on Cyngled's throat, another at his waist. Gaar

lifted him high and hurled him earthward. Cyngled twitched once and was still. The stone knife was in his hand but it would never be used again. The day of the Druids was over.

Marna was smiling at Gaar as he cut the thongs that bound her. This time her lips came up to meet his. For Elgen and Asgar and the rest there was no treasure. But they had no complaints. It had been a good fight. For Gaar there was the greatest treasure of all.

The hint of sorrow was out of Marna's eyes. The past was gone, and there was nothing here for her now. She was the daughter of a once great people. She would be the mother of a greater one. Her arm was linked with Gaar's as they took the first steps back toward the ship which would take them northward.

THE END



DAY OF THE DRUID

by Knut Enferd

Be'al, all-powerful god, drank the blood of his victims. Would Gaar be able to save Marna, whom Be'al kept in eternal sleep, and avenge her people?



He had to strike at the source of their power . . . they leaped to prevent him

FOG lay heavy on the North Sea, fog wreathed the land, fog crept into a man's very bones. Meanwhile the ships were locked in the harbor. Gaar lay stretched on the skin before the fire and cursed the fog.

How much longer was this infernal whiteness going to last? A man was thirty years old, in the prime of his life, with the blood running hot through the seven foot length of him. How much longer was he going to have to lie here in the great hall, eating and drinking and waiting for the roll of fat to show around his middle? A man wanted action and instead he was forced to loll around listening to stories.

Niffleheim and Hotunheim were all right, Gaar thought. A man didn't want to offend the Gods. On the other hand, Wodin forgive the thought, a man could tire of listening to the same old tales.

But wait. The voice that was speaking had stopped. This was a new voice. Elgen was finished with his tale and Vornung had started one. And this one wasn't about the Gods. Gaar twisted around and got up on one elbow.

"Who?" he demanded. "What did you say they called themselves?"

"Picts," Vornung said. In his day Vornung had sailed with the best of them, but now he was old. "It was many years ago. After a storm we found ourselves washed up on this strange shore."

"What sort of people are they?"

"An unlovely bunch, hairy, dressed in skins."

"Could they fight?"

"Ptuh." Vornung spat into the fire. "One touch of our swords

and they'd had enough. Only one thing they could do well. They could tell stories."

He leaned back and took a draught of mead and wiped his mouth reflectively.

"But what stories! We were stuck there for months and I learned enough of their tongue to understand them. They told tales that could curdle a man's blood, tales of a land that lies to the south of them, of treasure, of a beautiful woman locked in eternal sleep by the priests of her people."

Treasure and a beautiful woman. This was something to make a man sit up. Gaar's big hands were locked about his knees as he rocked back and forth thoughtfully.

"How far?" he asked.

"That they would not say. When they spoke of this they spoke fearfully. We might have pressed them, but we were in a hurry to get home."

Gaar was on his feet now. He went to the door and looked out. There was a hint of breeze, from landward for a change. Maybe the fog would lift soon.

"Tell us more," he said over his shoulder. . . . *

VORNUNG had been wrong about these Picts. They weren't afraid to fight, and they weren't waiting for the fight to come to them. Under cover of darkness they swarmed in over the gunwales of the ship.

Unlovely they were, and unwashed. Gaar had the scent of one in his nostrils as the dark fellow came at him. Gaar struck out and the Pict went overboard.

Luckily, the surprise had not been complete. And these Norsemen were used to fighting in close and rocky quarters. They sailed in with a will. Gaar was not too busy to do a bit of wondering.

A man was crazy to trust an old fool like Vornung, crazy to follow a dream of white skin and red lips and incredible beauty.

Of course, these men of the North would have admitted that they were all a little mad to begin with. Who else but madmen would take such a tiny craft across hundreds of leagues of stormy sea?

Gaar laughed aloud. With ten men like his he'd sail anywhere, fight anyone. Elgen, up in the bow, had a Pict in each hand and was cracking their heads together. In the stern, Asgar was making short work of three Picts.

This fight wasn't going to last long. And a good thing. The way the Picts swung their clubs they might just happen to knock a few holes in the hull. Gaar breathed easier when the last of them went down.

"Now," he said. "Maybe we can talk some sense to them."

Vornung had taught him as much as he could recall of the language of the Picts. With a silent prayer that Vornung's memory had been good in at least this one respect, Gaar hauled a swarthy, bowlegged fellow to his feet.

"Look here. Can you understand me?"

Then the sun came up and the Pict got a look at the man who held him.

"I understand you." His words came through chattering teeth.

"Good. Don't be afraid. We mean no harm."

So Vornung hadn't been completely wrong. Gaar talked, keeping his eyes glued on the man before him. The fellow knew what he was talking about. Mention of the girl who slept brought a secret gleam to his eye. What about all the others? What about the priests?

"The Druids." It was a whisper.

"Is that how they are called? How far to this land?"

Gaar saw there wasn't going to be any answer to that. The Pict was scared. He was shaking his head. Some of his friends were coming around and they'd heard too. They were all turning pale around the gills.

"Tell him we'll hold his head under water until he speaks up," Asgar suggested.

Gaar hesitated. Fighting was one thing, torture another. It was all right to cut a man to pieces as long as he had a chance to do the same to you..

Maybe threats would do the trick. He told the Pict what Asgar had suggested and the man licked his lips. The rest of the Picts were in a panic, babbling among themselves.

Gaar understood enough of what they were saying. They were pointing at the sun. What the devil? Was this going to turn into one of those things? Were the Druids some sort of gods who lived in the sun?

No, that wasn't it either. The Druids were real enough. But they had some power that came from the sun, that could turn a man to cinders. To speak too much about them would mean death.

"No more certain a death than

awaits you if you don't talk," Gaar said.

He narrowed his eyes, made them as cruel as he could. He drew the sword from his scabbard, ran his finger along the edge.

The blood was hammering at his temples. That dream wasn't so crazy now. He could see her as though she were before him. Black hair hung about alabaster shoulders. Lips as red as ripe berries, lips that had waited a thousand years for his kiss.

"Wait," Gaar whispered. "Not much longer now." His sword glinted in the sunlight, hovered at the man's throat.

"I will tell you all I know," the Pict said.

THE inlet was a perfect hiding place for the ship. There were enough branches about to screen it from distant eyes. And yet Gaar had the feeling that they were being watched.

He swung around suddenly. Nothing to be seen except the gently waving branches. A harmless scene, the dancing waters of the inlet and the serenity of the woods, and yet terror lurked there.

Considering the fact that their knowledge was only from hearsay, the Picts had directed him well. Down the coast of this great island, they had said, and then through a long channel. And then you sailed around the southern end and to the westward. There was a smaller island and a smaller channel.

And now it would be overland travel. Not far, the Picts had said, and they had wondered at these men who had the daring to sail through strange waters to cer-

tain death. There was a plain rising from the coast. Somewhere on that plain Gaar would find what he sought.

"I have a feeling," Asgar muttered. He was as blond as the rest, but a foot shorter than Gaar, and with a chest that threatened to burst through his breastplate.

"So have I," Gaar admitted. "In my bones." And out of the plain to the north came a scent like an opened grave.

They walked through the forest with their hands on their swords, these men of the North. A long twilight here, a twilight that brought shadows that could deceive a man. A strange land this, where Spring came early and where the air was soft.

Swords were worthless here, the Picts had said. A man's strength meant nothing.

A voice whispered to Gaar's mind that the Picts were right. But there was another voice, a voice that had grown stronger night by night as he sailed southward. This was a voice that came from long dead lips, but lips that retained their freshness.

"I hear something," Asgar whispered. "I hear something inside my head."

The others had heard it too. They stared at each other in the gathering dusk. There was magic here. But Gaar knew that there was magic to fight this magic.

And then suddenly it was night. On a far off peak a fire spurted upward. Was it a beacon or a device to lure them to doom? Gaar wondered. They paused in a grove, in a circle of stones. It was time to rest. A lassitude crept over them.

He knew then how strong the dark forces were. His inner voice warned him of the death that lurked in a circle of stones. But the power in this grove was strong. Gaar felt the torpor take hold of him. He saw the men stagger. Then, with his last ounce of strength, he had his foot against one of the stones and was kicking out.

The circle was broken and with it the spell. Gaar shook himself. He had learned one thing, to stay outside stone circles.

* * *

OVERHEAD the stars wheeled.

There was the Bear, and there was the Bull. If you could read them rightly the ocean was not trackless. The seasons were there if you could read them.

Tomorrow would be Spring. And tonight men in long black robes walked the great circle, related each of the stones to its constellation in the heavens, canted their hymns to the dark powers that had spawned them.

Tomorrow would be Spring. Tomorrow the sun would slant down between the two tallest stones and fall blood-red upon the Cromlech, upon the altar. Tonight they would burn brighter.

And Be'al would be appeased. Be'al the All-Powerful would taste the blood of the victims, would smell their flesh, and Be'al would know that his sons had not forgotten him.

He was all they had not forgotten. Too long for them to remember, too long since they had crossed the void from their parent planet. The sciences they had brought were gone. Only this residue of blood-lust remained.

"The girl stirs," Cyngled said. His beard was black and thick, his skin white, and whiter still the circular scar on his forehead.

In the sepulchre the air was damp as the high-priest looked down upon the girl. In the light of the flickering yew-torches her eyelids seemed to move. Cyngled's fingers hovered at the hilt of the sacrificial knife.

"Marna stirs," Glendyn whispered. "Tomorrow she will awaken. Let it be for the last time. As long as she lives we are in danger."

"She can do nothing alone."

"But she is never alone. How many times has her beauty brought men to her aid?"

"Their bones would make a tall pile," Cyngled agreed. His eyes were bright beneath hooded lids. "What about those who landed today?"

"They are somewhere in the forest. Once we thought we had them, but they broke away."

Footsteps sounded in the corridor and a hooded priest came hurrying over the worn stones of the floor. His fingers traced the sacred symbols in the damp air of the crypt.

"Well?" Cyngled demanded.

"We are having trouble following them. Their thoughts are shrouded. Something comes between us and them."

Cyngled's eyes darted back to Marna. He knew what it was that protected these strangers. Even in her sleep the girl had power. Glendyn was right.

"Tomorrow, then," Cyngled murmured. "In the meantime, watch her. You here, Glendyn, and you above, Twyn."

GAAR moved swiftly. Behind him came the others. They had covered miles but they were not tired. Not much further, Gaar knew. The growth was thinner.

"We'll come at them straight ahead," Elgen said, moving up to Gaar's side. "They'll never know what hit them."

In the starlight Gaar could see his outline. Asgar's bulk loomed close behind. Maybe the usual method of attack was best. Maybe Elgen was right. Yet there was this knowledge that swords would not be enough.

Then he caught the sound of voices. Out of the darkness ahead came a deep-throated, monotonous chant. With startling abruptness the forest ended and they were at the edge of a vast clearing.

Huge stones, too great for a man to move, formed a perfect circle. Towering thirty feet above the others were two monoliths standing a few feet apart. And directly before them was an altar, a great slab of rock supported by four stone legs.

About the altar hooded shadows moved slowly, murmuring their endless chants. Gaar was tempted. The surprise should be complete. But this thing held him.

He waited, and was glad that he had. There was the faint and flickering light of a torch. It seemed to come out of the very ground beyond the circle of stones. It did come out of the ground.

There was an opening of some sort, the mouth of a cave. Two figures emerged and he saw them clearly before the torch was extinguished. Then, even in the dim starlight, Gaar saw one of the figures move away.

"One of them is guarding the cave," Asgar whispered.

"In that case there must be something to guard." He thought he knew what it was. He was certain he knew.

"Listen," Gaar whispered. "I'm going to try to get inside."

"Alone?"

"One is better than a dozen for this job. That fellow seems to have pulled back into the mouth of the cave. If I can get him quickly his friends may never notice he's gone."

"What about us?"

"You wait here. It's almost dawn. By then I should be back."

"And if you're not back by then?"

"Turn around and get to the ship as fast as you can. There's no use trying if I can't get through. Don't ask me how I know that. I just do. That's an order. Understand?"

THEY understood. Gaar unbuckled his sword, handed his shield to Elgen. Next to come off was the breastplate. When a man's greatest need was stealth, he didn't want any metal on him.

A moment later he was off through the thin screen of trees, moving silently around the great circle of stones. At every step he felt it stronger, this voice inside himself. He had to keep out of the circle. He knew that.

Then he was behind the slight rise in the earth that was the opening of the cave. Very slowly now, Gaar moved, feeling his way. He felt the rock beneath his fingers. A few steps more and there was no rock. He turned inward.

Hugging the wall he inched for-

ward. There was a shadow, darker than the rest. Lips moved in the darkness, forming soundless words. Gaar's hands reach out, found a throat. The lips stopped moving.

Gaar lifted the body, carried it back away from the mouth of the cave. He almost fell down the stone staircase that yawned suddenly at his feet. When Gaar had recovered his poise he went on, taking each step gingerly.

He was going down into a darkness that smelled of the dungeon and even worse. Walls grew damp and clammy where he touched them. Slimy things scurried across the floor. The path Gaar was following twisted and turned.

Then there was a door. Gaar fumbled in the darkness. The door opened soundlessly. Beyond it was a faint and fitful light that led him onward toward its source. It led him into the room.

Gaar knew it was the end of the search. Its bareness told him what he had already suspected. There was no treasure. This was a people that did not believe in jewelled trappings. But the girl was here, in this very room. That was the only thing that mattered.

A black-robed figure hid the sarcophagus from Gaar's view. A broad back, wearing the folds of the dark priesthood. The back shifted uneasily, as though feeling eyes upon it, and Gaar caught a glimpse of something white beyond.

He stepped forward, light as a giant cat. He took another step and his foot scraped earth. The sound was minute, almost inaudible, but Glendyn heard. He whirled, his hand flashing toward his girdle. Gaar closed the gap between

them in a single leap. His left hand caught Glendyn's wrist, forced the knife back. But Glendyn was a tricky one, hard to hold. He shifted, kicked out, and Gaar stumbled.

The knife was at his throat now. He knocked it aside, drove his fist upward into a soft belly. Glendyn doubled and his jaw met Gaar's other fist as it came up. There was the splintering of bone.

BELOW a white, filmy covering she lay, beneath a flimsy veil that pressed gently upon her rounded form. Her limbs were whiter than the veil that covered them. Her hair was black as night. Her lips were redder than in his vision.

A thousand sleeps she had slept, and more. Older than the land from which Gaar had come, and yet she was younger than he. He bent forward and pressed his lips to hers. They were warm and yielding.

"Wake up," Gaar whispered. Then, louder, "Wake up!"

Was she dead? It seemed to him that she stirred, and yet it might have been the flickering light which created an illusion. Now he ran his hand through her hair. His big hands slapped at her cheeks, gently at first and then harder. His voice was insistent, commanding.

Very slowly, then, her eyes opened. Blank and staring, they were, as she hovered on the brink. Gaar's will pulled her to life. The blankness went out of her eyes and was replaced by a sudden gladness.

"You came. I knew you would come."

She struggled to sit up and saw that only the veil covered her nudity. She blushed. Gaar turned his back, bent and removed the black robe from the crumpled figure on the floor. Over his shoulder he handed the robe to the girl. When he turned to her again she was sitting up, a trace of color still in her cheeks.

"Where are they?" Marna asked fearfully. There was loathing in the glance she threw at Glendyn's body. "There are many more. Where are they?"

"Up above," Gaar told her. "This one and another were left to watch you."

"Good. They won't be coming back for a long time. Now they are busy preparing the sacrifices to Be'al." Marna shuddered. "It is the feast of Beltane."

Gaar spoke quickly. "What sort of men are they?"

"They are not men. They are devils. A long time ago they came out of the sky in strange ships. They brought strange powers and a strange god who demanded human sacrifices. My people were driven out, killed. I am the only one left."

"But why did they save you?"

"As a hostage, at first. And later because it pleased them to keep me as a symbol of the race they had vanquished. Every year I have awakened and they have used me as a mock sacrifice. And then they have put me to sleep again for another year."

"And today again?"

"For the last time. They have lost their power to act at a distance. And they grow afraid that I may call someone they cannot defeat. Their power is great now

on only this one day when the sun comes directly between the two stones they brought with them from their mother world."

She started suddenly and Gaar stared at her. "What is it?" he demanded.

"I feel something. I feel danger."

THREE was no time to ask questions. Gaar knew she would not be wrong. This daughter of a lost people had a knowledge he could not fathom. He lifted her out of the sarcophagus and set her on her feet.

"We've got to get out of here. Once we reach my men and set back for the coast they'll never stop us."

They were running now, back along the corridor down which Gaar had come. Half way they went, and then they heard the voices and the feet that came toward them from above.

Gaar listened intently. There were too many. One or two he would have fought, maybe even a half-dozen. But this was the tramp of many feet. They must have found the body at the head of the Stairs. Gaar cursed his luck.

"We'll have to go back. Is there another way out?"

"No none. It was the burial place for the kings of my people before the Druids came."

And it looked like it would be his burial place as well, Gaar thought. But he had to go back anyway. He couldn't take a chance on the girl being hurt in a fight in the dark. Besides, that fellow he had killed had a knife. It would be better than no weapon at all.

The feet were close behind them as they ran. The girl was too slow. Gaar scooped her up and ran with her under his arm. But still not swiftly enough. They had been overheard.

He had barely time to swing Marna behind the sarcophagus and out of immediate danger. He bent and tore the knife from Glendyn's loose grasp. And then they were on him, a flood of black-robed figures.

Blood spurted as the knife in Gaar's hand flashed. A man screamed, and then another as Gaar's fist made pulp of flesh and bone. His hands struck blows like Thor's hammer. He made them pay dearly for every backward step he took. But they came on still.

They were too many for him. They forced him back until a cold wall stopped him. Then, by the sheer force of numbers they overwhelmed him. He went down under a torrent of blows that drove everything from his mind but the thought that he had failed Marna.

DAYLIGHT, and Gaar's head ached as consciousness returned. He seemed to be a single aching bruise from head to foot. After a while he realized that Marna lay beside him at the bottom of the stairs that led to the cavern mouth.

Light came down strongly, too strongly. It was long after dawn. A stray thought flashed across Gaar's mind: his men would be well on their way to the ship: Yet there was no use castigating himself. Marna would have died before they could have reached her if they had come in a body.

"I'm sorry," Gaar said, and tried to turn toward Marna. Leather thongs bound him tightly but he rocked back and forth until he tipped onto his side.

"Not as sorry as I," she said, her eyes soft on his face. "If I had not called you would never have come."

"The only thing a Norseman fears is that he should die in bed," Gaar told her.

But he wasn't ready to die yet. If he could only get a little play into these thongs! His muscles bulged with the strain as he threw his strength into the effort. Then a scream filtered down and sent a shiver along his spine.

"The sacrifices have started," Marna said. "It will not be long now. They will be coming for us soon."

"Can't you do anything?" Gaar asked. "Can't you fight them with their own weapons?"

"Not while I am awake. When I sleep my soul is in communion with my people who have gone and I draw strength from them. But this is the feast of Beltane. While the sun comes directly between the two great stones the magic of the Druids is at its most potent. And mine is waning."

As her voice faded there came again the scream of a soul in mortal fear. The scream died quickly, merging into a rising paean from the Druids. Then there was a patter of sandal-clad feet and the light from above was blocked by the figure of Cyngled, the high priest.

In Cyngled's hand the great sacrificial knife dripped blood. Be'al would drink well this day, Be'al would be appeased. Behind Cyn-

gled came other priests, lesser ones whose faces revealed unholy joy as they came down the stairs.

Two of them lifted Marna but it took four to carry Gaar. Strong light made him blink as they emerged from the mouth of the cave. Shock forced his eyes to remain open as they entered the charmed circle.

Blood-red came the sun between the two monoliths to fall upon the great Cromlech that was redder still with human gore. A wave of nausea swept up from Gaar's stomach. He fought it down.

Then the strength filtered out of him as he was carried into the circle. Now he was a child in their hands. He felt himself being lifted, felt his back touch the slippery stone. Beside him Marna was laid, the black robe she had worn ripped from her body.

Cyngled's chant rose above them, the knife came up and hovered at Gaar's throat. The knife was coming down. And then it stopped! It stopped as the air was split by the battle cry of the Norsemen!

GAAR twisted his head and saw them come out of the woods beyond the circle. Like madmen they raged across the clearing. But nobody rushed to oppose them! Instead, the Druid priests drew back, gathered about Cyngled. As the Norsemen came into the circle the high priest's hands drew the magic symbols in the air.

And the Norsemen stopped! Like men of stone they were, a tableau of arrested motion.

There was no hope. The bitterness of gall was in Gaar's mouth as he turned his head from the scene. He looked at Marna. Her

eyes were bright, burning into his own. No hopelessness there. Her eyes were speaking to him.

They were willing him, willing him to strength! Gaar felt it come back to him. Her magic was stronger than she knew. He felt the strength come back in a surge that would not be denied.

This was only leather that held him. The leather could bite into his flesh as he strained. But it could not hurt him. His great chest filled with air and the thongs gave, stretched. And burst!

In a single leap he was off the altar. He wanted to rage into the Druid priests, to tear them apart with his bare hands. But there were too many. And Marna's will was telling him that there was something else he must do.

He knew what it was. He had to strike at the source of their power. They were turning to meet his charge, setting themselves solidly.

Gaar wheeled, spurted around them and then around the Cromlech. They guessed his purpose and leaped to stop him. They had to prevent him from reaching the two great stones. Gaar battered them aside and went through them.

His back was against one of the monoliths, his feet against the other. He climbed that way, ignoring the knives that slashed at his back. Then he was above the reach of their arms. The sun was full in his face. His shadow blocked the altar. His back was on stone, his feet were on stone. Two great pillars, rooted in the earth, and against them the strength of one man.

(Concluded on page 125)



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by Rog Phillips

I HOPE all of you know how much pleasure it gives me to print the letter below, from Louis E. Gardner of Alexandria, Virginia. He is one of those who wrote asking me to help him contact local fans or a local fan club. I printed his name and address with his request in this department. His letter tells the story.

Dear Rog:

Thanks to your efforts, and to Amazing Stories, I was contacted by members of the Washington Science-Fantasy Society, a small (but we hope, growing) group of Science-Fantasy Fans. In fact, I was elected president of the Society. Our vice-president is Robert Briggs, sec-treas., Frank Herkof.

We don't have a fanzine yet, but a committee is working industriously towards getting one. On the other hand, we do have several noted members who attended meetings now and then . . . Willey Ley, the rocket expert, for example.

Many thanks again for your help.

Now as to the real reason (frank aren't I) for this letter: How about a plug? Perhaps you can fit in an announcement similar to the following in the Club House:

District of Columbia Area Science-Fantasy Fans ATTENTION! Meetings of the Washington Science-Fiction Society are held every other Sunday at 7:30, Transportation Building, 17th and H St., N. W. Next meeting May 30.

If you feel that the date of the meeting will be out-of-date by publication time, simply mention that more data is available from me or from Frank Kerkhof, 1705 Q St., N. W., at No. 0634.

When we get a fanzine we'll shoot a copy to you by fastest means available . . . rocket if possible.

Very truly yours,
Louis E. Gardner, Jr.
310 E. Mason Ave.
Alexandria, Va.

Good luck to you, WSFS, and don't forget that some of the already existing fan-

zines carry regular departments reporting on meetings of S-F clubs IF the club sends them such a report. Fantasy-Times does, that I know of offhand. It's just up in New York, and probably has several D. C. readers.

Others who have written asking about local groups and wishing to contact fans are, for this time,

Keith Hoyt, 2011 N. Starr, Columbus, Ohio; Preston Joslyn, Lynne, N. H., (I'm not too sure of this one because the writing in ink on soft paper blotted too much for clear legibility); and Vaughn Greene, 22235 17th St., San Francisco 3, Cal., wants to know "where oh where is the little fan club in the bay area?" He knows several Frisco fans, but no club, so maybe there isn't one there. Can any of you enlighten him?

Katherine S. Duffy, 211 MacDougal St., Brooklyn, N. Y., says she and her husband would like to contact a grownup group. The Eastern Science Fiction Association is the only one there I know of. At its March meeting there were eighty-five present. Anyone in the New York area should contact James Taurasi of FANTASY-TIMES to find out about clubs and meetings.

Dale Tarr of the Cincinnati fan club asked that I announce the existence of that club so that those in and around Cincinnati can come to the meetings and join. This is a long established club and well worth joining. Contact Dale Tarr at 1402 Scott, Covington, Ky., which is just a stones throw from Cincinnati.

Jim Leary, acting president of the Science-Fiction, International, a club just forming, asks me to announce it to you readers. His address is 4718 Forest Hills Road, Rockford, Ill.

Also writing to me about this club which seems to be well started already are Dan Mulcahy, its sec-treas., 4170 Utah St., St. Louis, Mo., and Bob Farnham, 1139 E 44th St., Chicago 15, Ill. Dan Mulcahy writes that "SFI is a club for the average fan, its main activities intensive intermember

correspondence and the publishing of a fanzine (not yet begun)."

Frank Dietz, Jr., publisher of a new fanzine called SCIENCE, FANTASY, AND SCIENCE FICTION, sends me the first copy. Except for size it's almost a pro-mag, being professionally printed, 15¢ copy. He also wrote a letter in which he says;

"I recently discovered (I think!) one of the main purposes behind fandom which I don't think most fans realize is there. It is this: Fandom is working to the end that the common person become interested in science fiction. In doing this it makes Mr. Common Person realize what a terrible, dull life he is leading, and it makes him realize that there is a great need for radical changes in the so called 'modern society.' He realizes that if such changes are not made, there is going to be a catastrophe, and if anybody is lucky to escape, or unlucky enough to escape, it is very probable they will descend to a barbaric state in a very short time."

This is a good attempt to discover what is behind fandom, but is in my opinion largely incorrect. First, fandom does not draw people into science fiction, but just the reverse. Second, we are too catastrophe conscious, and in the main stf tries to create a picture of permanent civilization, in which space travel, continuous super-development of science and the race are just around the corner, etc.. That is the healthier picture which should dominate the spirit of fandom and usually does.

We may be on the verge of a Final War, but I don't think so. I have faith in the future of mankind, and believe stf should and usually does life us out of our ties to the present and enable us to view it as just one stage in the Whole, so that we don't naively believe we are already super beings with a Final Science better than anything in the past or the future,—or even better than anything else in the universe. IT OPENS OUR EYES. That is the purpose of stf and also of fandom, if either has a purpose.

John Potter writes from Darien, Connecticut; "I noted with surprise in the June issue that you were unacquainted with that winsome creature known as the Soipdalgief. These affectionate monstrocities are fairly common in these parts, although seldom seen except by nature lovers and scaredy-cats." He accompanies his letter with a fan drawing of a beastly that, if it were real, would scare the pants off the statue of General Grant! (Wish I could reproduce the drawing for this department, but when I had the editor send it to the typesetters they went out on strike.)

Quite a few of you readers have been

joining the National Fantasy Fan Federation (NFFF). It's really the best way to enter into fandom because so much of fandom already belongs, and you get good advice and make plenty of contacts. It is the largest group organization in fandom today, and growing all the time. Almost no one in it belongs to NFFF exclusively. Members have their separate activities and interests which NFFF tries in ways to serve where it can. For example, it has a manuscript service for fan writers. If your favorite fanzine can't print your ditty or your short-short-short story, send it to the NFFF ms. service through K. Martin Carlson, 1028 3rd Ave., Moorhead, Minn.. And don't forget that in 1949 this department is going to award a hundred dollars in prizes for the best amateur writings in fanzines for the year 1948.

No manuscripts are available in the NFFF mas Bureau at present. One reason, perhaps, is that too many fans are trying to publish their own fanzines. One of the quickest ways to lose interest in fandom is to bite off more than you can chew, and publishing a fanzine is one of those things. What you do in fandom is your own business and I have no right to criticize, nor any intention to criticize what you do; but a fan should go slow on starting his own fanzine. He should break into the pages of other fanzines first and see how he likes that. In that way he isn't under any compulsion to get out another issue, and, being unable to take the time to compose one, decides to quit fandom. There are too many people who would still be good fans today if they hadn't fallen for the publishing bug and found after they got into it that it was too much work to publish. There is

REAL need for entertaining material for existing fanzines. If you want a large audience the best way to get it is in an established fanzine,—NOT by starting one of your own.

Also, if you want to publish and don't care to publish your own, get your mimeo, write your own stuff and mimeo it, but make a deal with some fanzine editor to INCLUDE it in his fanzine. Most fan eds would be tickled pink to get one or two already mimeoed sheets to insert in his fanzine and help fill it out. (You don't want to do all the work without making any of the subscription money? Ha, ha, ha. I have yet to hear of a fan ed who makes a profit!) As Chas Burbree always says, egoboo is the only pay a fan gets for all his work. Why start a small fanzine and get an audience of twenty to fifty with a lot of hard work, when you can have all fandom for your audience by just writing, and giving your manuscript to various fan

eds to include in their zines? There are few fanzines who don't have trouble getting material to fill out their quota of pages.

And now to the fanzines.

FANTASY-TIMES:- May, 1948; the price for new subscriptions goes up to 15c, 2/25c. It's worth it. Jimmy Taurasi has been publishing F-T for several years and is an old reliable of fandom. A report on the ESFA convention is the feature in this issue. Also is some good reporting on the spread and spiking of a rumor about a prozine about to fold, which was untrue. Dr. Gardner continues his review of 1947 in Science Fiction.

SPACEWARP:- May; Part four of STF BROADCAST is by Mario Stanza. Wilkie Conner continues his controversial and dubious discussion of What. Then is Stf. Under the heading, "Certainly? Certainly!" Homer Z. Dingbat, Bv.D. (Doctor of Bibliographical Versimilitude) discusses the Heintzburg Uncertainly Principles in quite a pelucid style. The fact that he knows what he's talking about handicaps him, because there are so many more ways it can be misunderstood entertainingly. But wait! He DOES find a tangent! A semantic twist changes a word, and presto, he invents a subparticle time travel, names it after himself, and Dingbat Subparticle Motion takes its place alongside Einstein's theory. A list of a few authors of stf with their pen names is very interesting. Art Rapp certainly puts out a fine, entertaining zine!

THE MUTANT:- May; "Any resemblance between the page numbers listed on the contents page, and those on the pages themselves is indubitably fortuous." This official organ of the Michifans is (I suspect) mostly masterminded by r-tRapp, sole owner and instigator of Spacewarp. An entertaining argument between Ben Singer and Radell Nelson on the existence of God reminds me of the following quote from some place or other: "To an Englishman, God is an Englishman twenty feet tall, with a long beard." Singer reveals himself to be an anthropomorphological atheist and an unconscious functional theist.

Nelson reveals himself as an anthropomorphological theist and associate member in the school of causist dualism. Neither of them show much symptoms of ideological stasis, and both of them could profit by a careful study of the neumenal aspects of semantics. However, they are having too much fun to take the time to study. In their game Darwin and God are the paddles, and a poor pterodactyl is the ping pong ball.

The entire issue is extremely worth while. Club business takes up only three of the 22 pages.

OTHER WORLDS:- May; is the new KAY-MAR TRADER. Paul Cox, 3401 6th Ave, Columbus, Ga., does a very good job of taking over Carlson's zine, now that Carlson is devoting all his spare time to NFFF business. A good balance of articles and ads. Send him a nickle and get a sample copy. You'll like it.

THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER:- March; this official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society is five pages of interesting and informative items. To non members it costs fifteen cents, which is a shame, because it could fill a valuable need and have a wide circulation in fandom if it were sold at cost or distributed free with the rocket society absorbing the cost. After all, none of the other fanzines attempt to make a profit!

FANTASY REVIEW:- Apr.-May; An interesting discussion of permissible stf in slicks by an American writer starts off this issue of the English fanzine. With the typesetters on strike in Chicago, this fanzine is superior in format to Amazing Stories itself.

THE STFANATIC:- A new fanzine perpetrated by Hugh McInnis, c/o Y. M. C. A., Warren, Ark. Free for the asking, but limited circulation. This first issue is a modest, half size zine. Most interesting item is the editorial in which Hugh gives his history in fandom. It bears out again what is obvious; —that the many fanzines published in fandom by whoever gets the urge, and for as long as the urge lasts, are what really ties fandom into a recognizable whole.

I want to remind those of you who came in late that when you write to a fan editor for any reason, PLEASE enclose a stamp for a reply. Hundreds of you readers are entering fandom now for the first time. When the poor actifan gets fifty letters in a week to answer, he's snowed under, but worst of all, if no stamp is included for reply in any of them he has to fork out a dollar and a half for stamps just to answer his correspondence. At the same time I want to thank all of you who have heeded this advice. I've received several letters from fan editors thanking me for mentioning the enclose-a-stamp advice, and stating that if I hadn't they would have been stuck far more than they could afford and would have had to give up.

OLD AND RARE, 5 pages, is a joint enterprise by Howard Miller and Don Wilson featuring a horror-humor thing entitled "The Horrible Shadow Over South Baxle Street," under the pen name, P. H. Hatecraft.

FAPASNIX, 16 pages, by Walter A. Coslet (Coswal) is also for sale to non members at 10c a copy. His wife, Dorothy, has an interesting two pages in it on Hubby's Hobby. Coswal completes his author-index of 1946 prozines with the Wierd Tales index. Besides those two articles there is much of real interest to everyone whether they are FAPAns or not.

FANDANGO, 12 pages, is the "personalized composed-on-the-stencil production of Francis T. Laney. Libel suits should be brought against the mimeographer, Chas. Burbee, Jr.," Since all the libel is against his friends who also libel him, he is safe, because he could enter a counter suit. More fun, more people killed.

BURBLINGS, 5 pages, by Charles Burbee. An article by a natural born pessimist with proclivities for generalization from unique instances, Willie Watson, occupies the first page and a half. Under the title "Olla Podrida" Burb confesses that that article should have gone into Wild Hair No 2, the magazine for insurgents. The last two pages are an essay on mother love entitled "The Ethics of Electronics," by Burbee, which is something of a classic in punch line humor. It goes into great lengths on Burb's troubles in trying to get an oscillator to work, ending with total failure. No matter what he tried it wouldn't work. Then, "Last night my mother said to me, 'Our radio doesn't work. I'm sure you can fix it.'" And then comes the punch line, "This has been an essay on mother love."

SOIPDALGEIF, 5 pages, is a one shot put out by Burbee, Rex Ward, Don Wilson, and Howard Miller, and myself, in honor of Howard Miller and I joining FAPA! The cover is done by Howard, who is quite an artist. The title—who knows? The last sentence in the zine is, "This magazine is intended to die stillborn, and in this objective, at least, I believe we have succeeded." THE RATING OF ROCKET FUELS, 4 pages, by Thomas S. Gardner, is a printed pamphlet, purely educational and instructive. It should be intended for wider distribution or printing in a prozine, since its worth merits greater circulation than the members of FAPA.

HORIZONS, by Henry Warner, Jr., is 12 pages of rambling discussion of various subjects, ending with a review of Eugene Sue's, "The Wandering Jew." However, Mr. Warner has evidently not taken into account the history of the time that stupendous book first appeared, in his review; and has judged its worth merely from its contents without regard to conditions existing in fact at the time the book appeared. At the time of the writing of the book the

religious order it painted so evil was just that, and the book did as much to clear up that evil and raise that religious order to its present state of high, selfless service to humanity, as Don Quixote did to end the farcical code of the knight, and Uncle Tom's Cabin did to end slavery. Because of that, and NOT any inherent literary quality "The Wandering Jew" is classed among the world's great books.

Between the front page and the review of Sue are seven pages of interesting discussion on such topics as music, Disney pictures, prozines, speculations on fandom—one I want to quote:

"Fandom is tremendously important to an individual when that person has an interest and activity in the field. Like every other activity on which an individual spends hundreds of hours, fandom influences to a certain extent his future thinking, beliefs, and even actions."

PHANTEUR, 13 pages, by D. B. Thompson, spends three pages on discussion of what Thompson call politics; four pages on very capable book reviews; and four pages on the same thing I'm doing here—reviewing a FAPA mailing. Page 8 tells of Thompson's visit to Denver where he saw Stanley Mulen, editor of THE GORGON, which is doing so well.

HW CHENEY JR., 4 pages, by Harold W. Cheney, Jr., who is very smart to give his FAPA zine his own name and make me type it twice! Outstanding point in the issue is the statement at the extreme bottom of the first page, which is, "Puhleese, oh sob, puhleese turn the page." Who could resist?

H-1661, 6 pages, by Jas. Hevelin, besides reviewing the last mailing, discusses at length some ideas on what to do in case the atom bomb wipes out civilization. The only basic fallacy in his ideas is the naive assumption that after destruction of civilization present ownership rights to land will be respected.

One FAN'S OUTLOOK, 4 pages, by Stan Woolston, is devoted entirely to comments on a previous FAPA mailing. This, if done universally would lead to something horrible!—entire mailings discussing previous discussions which discussed previous discussions, etc., of some ancient mailing in the days when there were FAPAns who wrote something different. Don't get me wrong, though. The above was just an interesting thought that occurred to me, and not intended to reflect on Stan in any way. The four pages of Stan's zine cover a surprising number of subjects and worth reading. For example, Stan says his dreams are black and white instead of technicolor

and asks if others are the same as he is on that. Personally, I can't remember—! THE FANTASY ANTHOLOGY INDEX, no 1, is 8 pages, edited and published by Sam Moskowitz and Alex Osherooff, with a discussion of Cummings by Gardner. An index is of course an index. In a book it tells you what's in a book, but unfortunately you have to have the book to have the index, unless someone publishes the index in a collection of indices so that you can look it over. Eight such indices are contained in this issue,—a very worthwhile service to FAPAns.

GOSTAK, 6 pages, by Don Bratton, intelligently written. The last page quotes something humorous from the dictionary:—Uranium, n. A rare, heavy white metallic element . . . Has no important uses.

YELLUM, 9 pages by Ron Maddox, devoted to the exclusive pursuit of humor, and here and there catching up with it. It starts off with the fictitious review of a non-existent book published by the Spit-Tune Press, New York. It winds up with a very short-short story about a queen whose courier rushes in with the news that the people are revolting, to which the queen agrees. Beg pardon, there's another page. The zine winds up with a very short-short story about a kid named Foarwoarnd, who, when he suddenly sprouted an arm in the middle of his chest and another in the middle of his back, was put to bed by his mother who then made the erudite remark that Foarwoarnd was forearmed. In case you're interested, it says that the editor and perpetrator of this zine can be reached only through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

ORACLE, 16 pages, by C. B. Stevenson. The first few pages are devoted to a pronunciamento, which is too deep for me; and then he goes on to reviews of other FAPA mailings, winding up with a full page apology for all the previous pages.

Now we come to the four items that show signs of real pride in publication rather than just mimeographing for the purpose of getting it printed so you can read it.

MASQUE, 21 pages, by William Rotsler, is primarily a piczine (picture fanzine), and successfully done with various colors of paper and inks. A lot of work went into it.

ICHOR, 13 pages, by Dale Hart, is filled with poetry and parables. A litho cover and good paper make this a quality production.

LIGHT, 18 pages, by Leslie Crouth, has a fantasy cover depicting Cthulhu, by J. Cockcroft. The contents are too numerous to start reviewing them in detail, but they are outstanding for originality and nothing gives the impression of just being filler to make

up the pages. A labor of love.

MOONSHINE, 17 pages, by Len J. Moffatt, experiments with a new cover of black drawing paper and simplicity of design. Different colored inks were used on different pages. Len Moffatt has a well balanced zine with articles, poetry, fiction, and art work.

That's about all in this mailing. Perhaps you are wondering why so much space is spent on this if you, the reader, can't get any of the mailing. The reason is quite simple. The Club House is conducted not only for the benefit of your readers who aren't yet in actifandom, in order for you to get a picture of what goes on there that you can take part in, but also for fandom and those already in it. Fandom has a term called egoboo, which means food for the ego, and those boys who put out this mailing deserve all the egoboo they can get.

LOKI: 10c; Mr. Gerry de la Ree; 9 Bogart Pl., Westwool, N. J.

LUNACY: 10c; George Caldwell; 1115 San Anselmo Ave., San Anselmo, Cal.

MACRABE: 10c, 3/25c; Jack Doherty, 68 Latimer Ave., Toronto 12, Ontario, Can.

MUTANT: 10c; official organ of Michigan Science Fantasy Society; 113 N. Porter St., Saginaw, Mich.

N.F.F.F.: National Fantasy Fan Federation; K. Martin Carlson, sec.-treas.; 1028-3rd Ave., Moorhead, Minn.

NECROMANCER: 10c, 6/50c; David A. MacInnes; Box 1367, Memphis 1, Tenn.

SINE NOMEN: 5c; John Van Couvering; 902 N. Downey Ave., Downey, Cal.

SNIX: 10c, 4/25c; Walter A. Coslet; Box 6, Helena, Mont.

SPACEWARP: 10c, 12/\$1.00; Arthur H. Rapp; 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich.

SPACETEER: 10c, 6/50c; Lin Carter; 865 2nd Ave. S., St. Petersburg, Fla.

VARIANT: 10c, 12/\$1.00; official magazine of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. Allison Williams, 122 S. 18th St., Phila. 3, Pa.

THE ALEMBIC: Norman Ashfield; 27 Woodland Rd., Thornton Heath, Surrey, England.

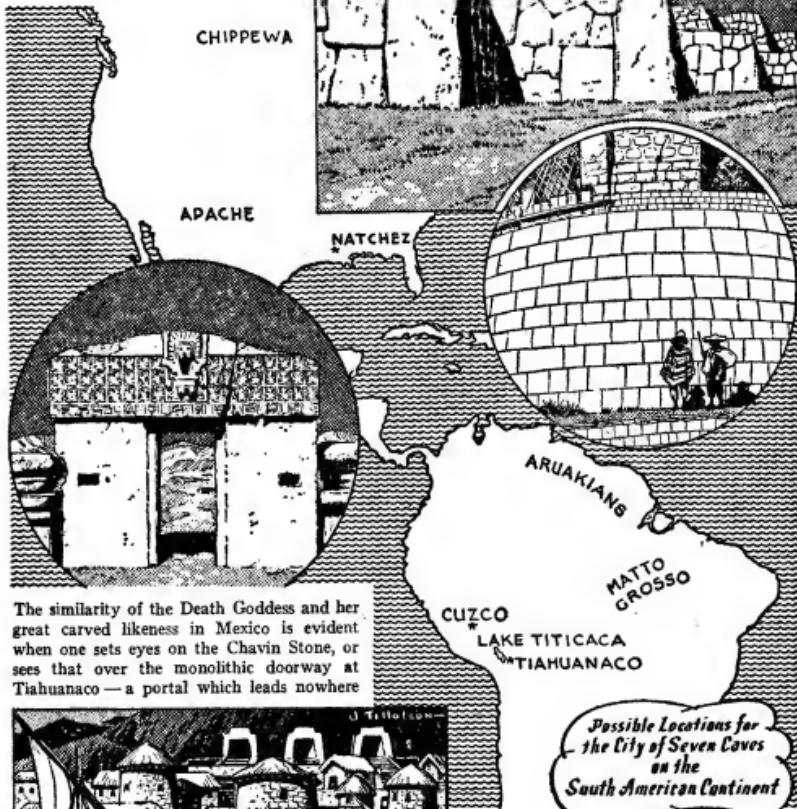
BURROUGHS BULLETIN: free; Vernelle and Dorothea Coriell; Box 78, Manitowoc, Ill.

OPERATION FANTAST: official organ of British Fantasy Library; Miss Joyce Teagle; Riverside, South Brink, Wisbech, Cambs., Eng.

(Notice to fan editors: Space permitting, this list will appear regularly. To get on it you must send your fan publication for review purposes. If you quit publishing please notify us so we can drop your zine from the list.)

SCIENTIFIC

It is in the architecture of the Sun Temple at Cuzco, the masonry at Saks-waiman, and the wall at Hatun Rüniyok that we come upon the best clues to the race who left us the legend of the lost City of the Seven Caves. However, the city still eludes searchers



The similarity of the Death Goddess and her great carved likeness in Mexico is evident when one sets eyes on the Chavin Stone, or sees that over the monolithic doorway at Tiahuanaco — a portal which leads nowhere

*Possible Locations for
the City of Seven Caves
on the
South American Continent*

Cuzco and Tiahuanaco are said to be joined by an underground boulevard, and Tiahuanaco itself was said to be built largely underground in ancient times. Legend says the tunnels pierce the Andes

MYSTERIES

THE SEARCH FOR THE CITY OF SEVEN CAVES

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

For many years the search for the City of Seven Caves has been going on. Will it ever be found?

ONE cannot absorb the totemistic lore and patterns of North America without immediately seeing the affinity to those of the Southern Continent. The similarity of the death Goddess and her great carved likeness of Mexico is recalled the moment one sets eyes upon the ancient sculpture of The Chavin Stone or sees that of the Serpent Deity over the monolithic doorway at Tiahuanaco—a portal which leads nowhere. Nor can one fail to grasp the significance of the serpents' heads which entwine the head of the Chavin figure, as a hundred similar costumes come to mind, or fail to note the trident scepter which he holds in each hand. Those strange hands, too, like many more anthromorphized totemistic-animal claws, have three fingers and a thumb reminiscent of the figures on the Natchez temples in the Mississippi and the Waikano dragon or boa-god holding up the maloka in the jungles of Matto Grosso. Or perhaps the flaming tridents of the Apache dancers will strike his memory.

The languages of South America are as yet almost an unknown field, yet strange connections seem to exist. The great mountain which towers over Lake Titicaca is called "Ilimani." If one should ask one's Indian guide if it means "Sun-mountain" or more closely "Sun-God," the exact translation in Algonkin Chippewa, he will stare wide-eyed, for that is the translation. Should one continue and quote for him a bit of Longfellow's Hiawatha¹—"Kichee Manitu, the Mighty"—he will no doubt hasten to ask you the name of the tribe using that language, and their location, for he will tell you that in his tongue, the "tu" which the Chippewa of the North tacks on for euphony, to him means "unparalleled splendor." And learning the name of the northern Algonkin, he will be even more amazed for he will then inform you that his tribe's name which is spelled Quichna is actually pronounced "Cheepwa." Its old meaning was "Ancient Chee."

It is this uncanny similarity upon which the present writer accidentally touched, that led to a

speculation concerning the possibility that the Chees (Chichimecs?) who were once driven out of their capital upon Lake Titicaca, and fled to the south according to their legends, but later, after many generations went into the northern forests, left behind them, there, some Algonkin tribes, as well as Algonkin words and ceremonies, or vice-versa, brought Algonkin words back with them as they returned under Nima-Quiche as Chichimecs and Quiches. Seeking out a Chippewa friend from an Algonkin reservation, I asked him if he ever heard of Nima-Quiche. He looked rather surprised, but answered slowly: "No, I can't say that I have, but I would very much like to, if you know anything about him!"

It was my turn to be bewildered then. He hungrily absorbed all I could tell him before he said: "All this is most interesting. In Chippewa, 'Nima' is 'Ancestor' or really, 'personal ancestor,' while 'Quiche' mean 'Illustrious'."

One cannot help but wonder if some actual leader connected with the similar figure who leads the Pueblo "Going-out-of-the-Gods," and the Natchez mention that the Chichimecs, under the power of a great orator who went from tribe to tribe uniting them for their return march southward, was named Nima-Quiche? From the Quiches we learn that he died before he reached the end of the migrations.

Yet if the Quichas have some words that are similar to the Algonkins, the Araukians, whose language is actually spoken in the environs of Lake Titicaca and who are at present islanded high up in the Andes, certainly present an old Algonkin, or, (what is probably a more correct name), a true Chichimec culture. All of their traits are built upon the pattern of the Wind-god. Dividing the two sides of the face for painting, bows and arrows for weapons, or the traditional weapon of the Wind-god, exposure burial, followed by secondary interment—the returning of the flesh to the air², feather-robés, the ceremonial

¹ Longfellow chose an Iroquois legend and placed it in an Algonkin setting in order to use Bishop Barraaga's dictionary of the Chippewa language, in composing Hiawatha.

² It is almost startling to discover that secondary burial was once also practiced upon Easter Island. This however, does seem to be a logical cultur-trait of the Wind-god, along with the bow and arrow, the air weapon, crested hair-dress, etc.

use of tobacco³, all point to an ancient connection. It would be most interesting, if when these languages are compared to those of the Northern continent, the Algonkin tongue of Michigan should prove to be a link between the Aruakian and the Quichua.

Are the Aruakians the lost fragment of the invasion of the Wind-god upon the ancient domains of The Earth Monster, or The Sea-Serpent? And then after ruling for some time, were they in turn driven out by Ek Balam? Or perhaps the Nahuas with the aid of allies?

ONE of the strongest clues to what might have happened is to be found in the styles of architecture. For example, we have the Palace of Manko-Capak, supposed to be the Legendary First Inca. Modern authorities do not allow him the place of being the first of the Quichua Incas. The reason is obvious. His name is not Quichua. Therefore, it is argued by historians, and rightly so, that he is a confused figure borrowed from some civilization previous to the rise of the Incan power. It is however, not improbable that he may have belonged to that first Incan power of many centuries, or perhaps millenniums, ago.

About his palace called Kol Kampata was a wall or moat, which was neither true Megalith nor yet Inca. Was this intermediary type of architecture that which belonged to the Incas' ancestral dynasties before they were driven out by an invading power?

Again at Hatun Runiyok in the eastern part of the city of Cuzco, was a wall of large irregular stones whose joints are fitted together with a thin layer of mortar or mud. This is the style of the Kol Kampata or the palace of the legendary Manko-Capak. When the wall at Cuzco was recently torn out for repair a great surprise awaited the workmen, for under the wall, which might be considered degenerate Megalith, was the beautiful workmanship of the master masons of all time—the true Megalith. These individual units of the wall were ground with consummate artistry to fit together and the inside of the wall was highly polished, while the exterior was left in the rough. Thus the Manko-Capak style was proved to be superimposed upon, or definitely later than, and entirely distinct from, the true Megalith.

At the Sun Temple, we seem to see two styles of architecture. In fact, most of the basic architecture of Cuzco is supposed to be not Inca but pre-Inca. Yet it is not the Manko-Capak style. The stones used are larger than the Incas were wont to handle, but are perfectly smoothed and polished in the form of cubes, the seams of which form parallel lines. The style is similar to the Inca.

³ The Algonkins inform you that tobacco was never used in connection with any of the reptile gods but was strictly confined to the four-directional cross of the Wind-god.

The true Megalith, best seen at such places as Saksa-Walman, where it is again partially covered by later and cruder masonry, and at Ollantay-Tambo where individual stones weigh as much as 170 tons, are the most beautiful examples of masonry the world has ever seen. The great stones are irregular in shape but ground to fit into each other like jewels. With Dr. Cook of Yale University, most scientists have exclaimed at seeing them: "But how can anybody credit the idea of grinding together with such accuracy the edges of stones which weigh tons?" especially when "with the finest work, as at Ollantay-Tambo, the joints are too fine to be seen by the naked eye" and "a lens becomes necessary to make sure that there is really a seam and not merely a false joint."

THUS behind the Incas and their supposed "First Sun" the mighty Manko-Capak, is still the mystery of the Great Megalith, who always built with watch-like precision but who seemed to do his master workmanship of all time in South America. When we consider the similarity of this work to that of the very earliest work in Egypt and the Mediterranean, and then note the superiority of the American masonry, one begins to seek for more data concerning the city which was theirs—Ancient Tiahuanaco, and the not too distant Cuzco.

It is then that we again begin to meet the legend of vast caves. Cuzco and Tiahuanaco are said to be joined by an underground boulevard, while Tiahuanaco, according to an Indian named Catari, living at Cochapampa, toward the close of the sixteenth century was anciently built largely underground. This has more than the significance of rumor, for our informer in this case, who dictated his information to Bartolome Cervantes, a canon of Chuquisaca, had been the direct heir of a quippu-camayoc (a quippu-reading historian to the Incas) and himself a reader of the old records. He further elucidated his statement by saying, that no idea of the size of the pre-Incan Capital could be gained from the extent of its surface ruins, since it extended through vast caverns which net-worked the Andes.⁴

Legend around the Sacred Lake whispers that the caverns extend clear through the Andes and come out upon the eastern side, where they connect through great ancient quays to what had been an old Amazonian Lake. "Are there seven of them?" But the native guides shake their heads, in the usual bewilderment.

Only Poznansky, who carries his immense knowledge of the city into many volumes, all of which have too much Latin enthusiasm for the staid and sober northern scientist, dares to lift his voice. Perhaps Tiahuanaco was in its prime some fourteen thousand years B.C. (He contends that the Potsdam University date for the Sun-

⁴ In the ancient tongue of the country, the Andes are pronounced "Antees" and are said to mean "toward the east."

Temple, which was never finished, of 9,550 B.C. is the time of the *fall* of the capital.) The city was in its prime, he declares, when Plato's Atlantis was supposed to be pressing for the conquest of Europe, and the Athenians were holding them back from the Mediterranean. This city then ruled the seas, for he argues, the great canals, etc., show that it was an ocean-going port.

This would make necessary a much lower elevation of the Andes, which seems most doubtful. However, if the city ruled from a great Amazonian Lake the entrance to which was gained from vast caverns, its position would be almost impregnable for other sea powers. It is a wild possibility, impossible to prove, until this old capital of a lost empire is explored. Yet its legendary name of "Taycala" is interesting if for no other reason than for its similarity to "Paxil Cayala" the inexpressibly ancient "Land of Maize." (Was it from here, that the Arikara, for example, of the Mississippi, say they obtained corn from the woman who lived on a lake which was on the other side of the caves?)⁵

Nor is this all. Under the city of Cuzco are the entrances to three great caverns. Legend has credited the city with four. One of them is under the Sun-Temple. In the past centuries numerous treasure-seekers have traversed the great stone steps leading into this cavern but none have ever returned. Finally one man came back. In his hands were two heavy golden bars but his eyes

⁵ See "Traditions of the Arikara" by Dorsey, as related by Man-Bear Tail.

stared vacantly as if he had been blinded, and his mind was entirely gone. It was then that the Peruvian Government ordered the entrances walled up.

Is it possible that this city and Ancient Tiahuanaco, either one, or the other, or both, were once known as The City of The Seven Caves? Was it here that the northern tribes, or enough amalgamated blood to carry on the tradition, fled through great underground caverns from the wrath of a victorious enemy? Was it from this "sacred lake" where the "sun was first seen"⁶ that they brought corn?

And would it be too much to hope, that when these vast caverns are in a future century revealed, perhaps to a more civilized world and a more cultured world than we have today, we may find not just gold-bars, but the infinitely more precious libraries, which could have untangled what are today such a mass of snarled and conflicting legend?

Yet in the meantime every lover of Ancient America, with its allegorical history, will stare toward this lost kingdom of the Andes where so many millenniums have gone by since that Something Happened, and in his mind, the words of the oldest hook will repeat themselves over with a new meaning—"and the feet of the Southerners were heard throughout the new land . . ."

⁶ Where the princes came after receiving the Sign of Royalty from Emperor Nacxit of the Eastern Sea Kingdom? See "Totem of the Tiger." Local tradition says the Sun was first seen on Lake Titicaca.

ATOMIC RAY DETECTOR

IF YOU have any old diamonds lying around the house, don't throw them away, as they may come in handy for something beside cutting glass or dressing up a finger. According to the National Bureau of Standards diamonds are actually more efficient as detectors of certain types of atomic radiation than the now famous Geiger-Muller counter, and probably a lot easier to carry around. All that is needed to make the diamond work is a couple of small brass electrodes, some current and an indicating device.

The diamond is clamped between the two electrodes with a current difference of about 1000 volts. When a piece of radioactive material is brought within a certain distance of the diamond, a pulsating current occurs, which may be amplified and picked up by earphones, loudspeaker, oscilloscope or some other similar piece of equipment.

In a model made up at the Bureau of Standards, several experiments have been made and in some cases the diamond works better than the counter. The reason that a diamond can act as a detector seems to lie in its symmetrical crystalline structure of a regular arrangement of carbon atoms

with a relatively large intervening space between them. The theory is that when a diamond atom is exposed to radioactive material, freed electron is accelerated through this intervening space within the diamond toward the positive electrode. Even within this short space it acquires enough speed to ionize other electrons which, in turn, accelerate in the same direction. These charges from the material make this a continuous action within the diamond, this action, in turn, gives off a small pulse of current which can be recorded.

The larger the diamond, the more electrons would be working, consequently a better count can be made.

Apparently the diamond quickly recovers from its ionized state in much the same manner as a nerve in the human body. This property of recovery makes the diamond a much faster counter than the ordinary Geiger-Muller. It has been shown that the sensitivity per unit volume of a diamond is much greater than any man-made device. So, just in case things don't work out so well, hang on to your old, used diamonds, they may come in handy some day.—Pete Bogg

THE END

SLIPSTICK SLANTS

By FRANCES YERXA

Here are a few unusual slants on that mystery to the layman, the slide rule

ABOUT the only two mathematical operations that can't be performed on an engineer's slide rule are addition and subtraction. Practically everything else can be done. And oddly enough the slide rule stemmed from the basic idea of addition and subtraction—but not of the numbers themselves—rather, their logarithms, a somewhat different matter which produces the results of multiplication and division.

William Oughtred, John Napier and John Briggs are the names most frequently associated with the slide rule. They all lived about the same time during the seventeenth century and each made fundamental contributions to the instrument, which is so indispensable to engineering today.

If two sliding scales of paper, wood or metal, have graduated on them equidistant marks, suitably numbered, by sliding one scale on the other, the sum of two numbers can be obtained. Thus the most simple and elementary slide rule becomes a device for adding and subtracting.

If you recall your logarithms, you will remember that adding the logarithms of numbers is the equivalent of multiplying and that subtracting logarithms is the equivalent of dividing numbers. What then, is simpler than inscribing the logarithms of numbers on these sliding scales, and using them for multiplication and division? Obviously, nothing, and that is basically what a slide rule now consists of.

The instrument was put in its present form by a French engineer, Mannheim. With the addition of numerous other scales besides the simple one for multiplying and dividing, the slide is an extremely flexible tool capable of solving problems that would take a long time with merely paper and pencil.

With a slide rule one can multiply, divide, raise to powers, extract roots, use trigonometric functions directly in problems, find logarithms, and in general do most all of the problems that are encountered in everyday engineering without referring to elaborate tables and handbooks.

Slide rules are manufactured in many special forms, each designed to appeal to a specialist like the electrical engineer, the chemist and so on. The longer a slide rule, generally speaking, the more accurate it is. Thus with a conventional ten-inch slide rule it is possible to work with three significant figures, usually more than adequate

for most problems. However slide rules are made twice as long as that and even longer where extreme accuracy is desired.

A number of circular slide rules are made. These differ not one wit from the regular linear rule except that they are effectively longer. It is as if a three foot rule was bent in a circle. The principle of operation remains the same.

A slide rule is extremely handy when a large number of problems are to be solved, all of a general type, or all of the type that requires substitution in a formula, simple or involved. Then it is fascinating to watch an operator flick the slide back and forth and in a matter of minutes give the correct answer, a job that would perhaps require many times that if done by direct paper-and-pencil work, or by reference to tables.

The slide rule is now so common that it is regarded as the symbol of the engineer. Look at any engineering school campus, and the students will be found wearing their slide rules like the knights of yore wore their swords.

Because the tool is relatively simple it is not difficult to manufacture and hence is not unreasonable in price. The cheaper slide rules are made of wood covered with celluloid or plastic scales whose graduations and numbers have been simply stamped into them. The better rules are made of a highly seasoned box-wood which does not warp or shrink, and the graduations are put on the plastic scale-faces by a ruling engine. Some of the newer rules are made of light metal to whose faces plastic scales are cemented.

Engineers become so accustomed to working with slide rules that they often forget how to calculate without them! Even simple multiplication and division escape them.

The vast introduction of automatic calculating machines into science and industry does not affect the importance of the slide rule. These calculating machines are so huge and complex that they are limited in their application.

However it is not uncommon to see electric computing machines for the simple operations in an engineering office. These machines are even faster than a slide rule because all they require is the punching of keys. Nevertheless they can't handle the complex operations that the slide rule can. As long as there are engineers there will be slide rules!

THE END

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.



Address Your Letters to:

AMAZING STORIES "DISCUSSIONS," ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING CO.
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WE STILL HAVE HIM!

Sirs:

I am writing to you to ask what has happened to the articles by L. Taylor Hansen. In addition, so far as I am able, I should like to explain WHY those articles of his are probably more important to students—albeit doubtless less remunerative to you—than those most interesting stories of Shaver's.

In the first place, Hansen is dealing with materials that are available to other inquiring minds. Hansen makes no claim to "revelation." Through his devotion to his subject, Hansen has come across materials in the field of archeology that other less diligent students would have missed completely.

Lastly, I take the liberty of pointing out that Mr. Hansen has been most helpful to this student. In response to a letter addressed to him by the undersigned, certain questions concerning the origins of some of the ancient totems were answered. Rarely does a reader find a contributor (author) so helpful.

Let me proceed to explain the paramount importance of Hansen's articles to me—and, quite probably, to other students. Let us suppose that many other "dabblers" (like the writer) are somewhere between one-quarter, and one-half sold on some of Shaver's ideas. Being skeptical, we devote our time to finding tangibles to support, or deny, Shaver's stories. I'd like to submit that much of what Hansen has written, together with other allusions which I have encountered, can be taken to strengthen Shaver's position. Put together with OAHSPE, Hansen's statements also make reasonably good sense—the again it is the struggle between Hansen's documents, and OAHSPE's "inspiration."

Here are two questions that I'd like to have someone answer—the Geology department at the University of Illinois seems unwilling to consider Reginald Daly, and so, I cannot consider an answer that does not take his hypothesis into account. FIRST, is there ANY accurate estimate of the AGE OF THE EARTH? What is the estimate based on? What is the possibility that the seismic disturbances recounted in the myths of nearly all

ancient peoples were caused by the capture of the Earth by the Sun? (This question implies that settlement of the Earth took place in cold space—which in turn, lends credence to Shaver's ideas about destructive solar radiation.)

In conclusion, let me request a continuation of Mr. Hansen's excellent articles. They have been of tremendous help to me, as I am sure they have been to countless others of your readers.

One final question, and I'll ring down the curtain: What are the chances (in your opinion) that MAN (collectively) is a retrogression from a nobler species, rather than a progression from an amoeba?

John M. Heaps,
1303 West University Avenue,
Urbana, Illinois

Mr. Hansen's articles will continue to run in AMAZING STORIES for a good long time! Witness this particular issue. We are pleased that you think so highly of his work—and we do know that he is one of the very best men in his field, and when he says a fact is a fact, it is!

As for an accurate estimate of the age of the Earth, you can safely say there is none. All estimates are just that—estimates.

As for the Earth being captured by the sun, no matter what Shaver says, your editor believes it was not. However, he can't prove it, and he only says he is entitled to his opinion. We think the destructive radiation got through after the water bubble that surrounded the earth broke and caused the Biblical flood.

We would say that Man is a progression, insofar as his body is concerned. What his soul or identity is, is something quite different, since it is independent of the body. Scientists cannot show us the soul under their microscope lens, nor produce the physical organ itself, if such it is, and say "here is your soul." (right next to the liver, or the spleen!) You asked us!—Ed.

FLASH!—THEY'RE HERE!

Sirs:

This is the first time I have ever written to any magazine although I have been reading all kinds

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for the past twenty years. What prompts me to do so now is your request in the July issue for information on "flying saucers," and an article which appeared in the "Manila Times" about two weeks ago. (I intended sending you the clipping, but somehow it was misplaced.)

This article was on the front page and the heading read "FLASH! They're here!" It went on to say in a very vague and somehow jocular manner, that a pilot flying over Northern Luzon had seen a "flying saucer." The article did not specify whether the pilot was flying a civilian or military plane. Nor did it mention the date nor exact location of the pilot's observation of this "flying saucer."

Though the paper treated the matter lightly, I am quite sure that whoever wrote the article must have had some definite information, otherwise a newspaper as influential and conservative as the "Manila Times" would not print it. (This paper has the largest circulation in the Philippines.)

I am sure that if you wrote the Editor of the "Manila Times" they would not only be glad to send you a copy of this article, but may be able to give you much more information than appeared in print.

I find your stories very interesting. In fact, I believe "Wandering Egos" was the most original story I have ever read, and I have read everything from Burroughs to Wells. It certainly was something *different*. I can truthfully say I have enjoyed every one of your stories, without exception, for the past three years. And your articles are really excellent. I always read them first.

After all these sincere praises for your fine magazine, may I register one small complaint?

Several months ago, you used to publish many articles on deros, cave explorations, strange happenings, and what's more important, "flying saucers"; but lately, you mentioned that all this information has no place in a magazine such as AMAZING STORIES so they were relegated to another magazine privately published by one of your authors.

Now, may I ask you, is it fair to take all this information away from your readers and give it to some other publication? Actually, I believe articles like these are the heart and soul of AMAZING STORIES because *what is more amazing than the hidden truth revealed for the first time?* In fact, the reason I started reading AMAZING STORIES regularly about three years ago, was the stories of Shaver which attempted to reveal a hidden truth and which brought forth many articles in your magazine of the type which you now say are not fit for AMAZING STORIES. I am sure many thousands of readers, who joined your magazine because of these "amazing" articles, just as I did, will be glad to have them back. I, for one, would like to see all the information, discussions, articles, etc., on cave exploration, flying saucers, and other phenomena, published in full in your magazine; and not in some obscure, unknown publication

which is read by few people and which we here in the Philippines and other foreign countries are unable to get.

Keep up the excellent work (I repeat, all your stories, without exception for the past three years, were really very interesting).

Let AMAZING STORIES live up to its name, amazing not only in fiction, but in fiction and Truth.

Henry S. Baughman,
516-520 Sto. Sepulcro, Paco,
Manila, P. I.

Thanks for your report on flying saucers. We don't intend to stop publishing such material, although we will not endeavor to establish its truth. If you find truth in Shaver's fiction, and in stories of flying saucers, we won't object. Personally, your editor finds many of these truths too, and thinks they have not lessened in our magazine. We have always predicted the future to an amazing degree, and will continue to do so. The current issue should prove that, and the next. Just stick with us.—Ed.

AT LAST, A TRANSLATION!

Sirs:

Below is a "trans-conception contact" or Automatic Writing, translation of the words which were listed above the name of Mr. Harry L. Oberg, in the January issue of AMAZING STORIES.

Esti Tamil caj Mages.

Newly appointed, King-Prince "Anointed," was born once long ago.

Ser tia banji.

Far away toward the East.

Calme do mentes.

What new order cometh.

Mentes mean tarsli.

Cometh also appointed.

Do carmi so trejan.

When forthright; man willing!

Stes to maj coronovl.

This be thine own Crowning.

Do mensa persil tremi va gero.

What must the whole world practice that man may advance?

Egri te medu savir do pordan.

All Mighty! Most Merciful! Savior of all, forgive us.

Prandies heme eglu neste.

Thy Divine Blessing! Thy Will be Done!

Cardeve rendimu esten seri ban tor.

On Earth as it is done in Heaven, and ALL POWER, will prevail.

Myrtle Ruth Duke,
2030 S. Vermont Ave.,
Los Angeles 7, Calif.

Thank you, Miss Duke, for your kindness. We are sure our readers will appreciate your translation of the mysterious words in the manuscript "I Have Been In The Caves" which was published in AMAZING STORIES.—Ed.

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ANTI-GRAVITY

Sirs:

The secret of anti-gravity has been discovered and there remains only to devise the mechanism in which to create the de-grav lifting unit and the de-grav propulsion device.

No, I did not invent it nor am I referring to one of Mr. Shaver's wonder mech of the caverns. The item to which I refer is a reference, in a science note, to the discovery of how to lift a sheet of aluminum with an electro magnet.

Now, as everyone knows, aluminum is not a magnetic metal. Nevertheless this feat has been accomplished. The method is simplicity in itself and the wonder of it is that it was not discovered years ago.

In the system, as presented to the patent office, a strong induced electric current is set up in a sheet of aluminum and an AC electromagnet pulls against the magnetic field of this current.

Now if the magnet is placed below the induction coil and aluminum and the polarity is inverted the aluminum will be repelled and will tend to rise into the air.

In order to convert this method to an actual de-grav unit, it is necessary to create a method of inducing the current into the subject matter (either silicon, over land, or hydrogen, over water) from distance. And then producing an electro magnet which will react with this current, with sufficient power, not only to lift itself but to lift our flier also.

This however lies in the realm of engineering rather than in the technology of the subject and should be a relatively simple project now that the theory has been discovered. It is at least a much easier problem than the devising the atomic bomb under a time limit, and that was accomplished.

How about it? Do any of you Shaver fans feel like putting in a few hours of work on the theory of this thing?

If any of you have the necessary mathematical background to put this thing into mathematical form, it will go a long way to stopping the scoffing at the impossible Shaver science. It will not of course prove the existence of the caverns and the Titans, etc., but it will prove that such things are possible and wake up our science and our Government to an investigation which will in turn clear up a lot of points once and for all.

So please get busy. Especially Mr. Graham. If any of the adherents to the Shaver theories can accomplish this thing, he can. Where he gets that mathematical analysis of his I don't know, but it is the thing I believe will break this problem.

John William Hattzdale,
Rm. 329, Ried Hotel,
Salt Lake City, Utah.

What you say is extremely interesting—and we hope that it will result as you say it could. Think of what we could do, with gravity conquered!
—Ed.

A SIMILARITY?

Sirs:

After purchasing the September edition of AMAZING STORIES, I was scanning the "Observatory," and noted that it was claimed many favorable letters were sent to your offices regarding Shaver's story "Gods of Venus," which appeared in the previous issue. I agree on the face of that, but apparently very few of these readers have had occasion to read any of Edgar Rice Burroughs' books—the popular "Mars" series.

I can recall those books as the first publications in which I read planet stories, and though many years have passed since I read that series I can still recall his "Gods of Mars," a very entertaining book. The object of my writing is to complain that Shaver's story, though good in its own light, comes perilously close to plagiarism. Even the title of the story differs but little from Burroughs' book. The plot is almost identical; the ending, except for a few words and changed names, is identical. In Burroughs' book the girl is in a revolving chamber, which will not turn back to the entrance side for a year, and in Shaver's story it is about the same. Even the System of Gods is so similar that it seems to me Burroughs' book was open on one side of Shaver's typewriter as the manuscript piled up on the other side.

"AMAZING STORIES" is one of my favorite publications of "escapist" literature, and I enjoy every issue. However I thought I might bring attention to this feature which I mentioned above, and I am afraid that I would be bard to convince that no other reader noticed this amazing similarity and commented thereon.

Yours, for more and better stories, and Shaver should stick to his cave *fantasies*.

Forrest O. Shoup,
Box 74,
Eatontown, N. J.

First, there are said to be only seven original plots in all literature. So, every one of the stories we've published, "come perilously close" to plagiarism. But you go a little too far in your criticism. Nowhere in the story is there a single sentence which is the same as Burroughs', even by accident. As for the plot development, how else would you have it occur? In an illogical way? As for the ending, it is not identical, even in two connected words. The gadget used is vastly different, and nothing at all is listed from Burroughs. It may be an imitation of the Burroughs type of book! But then, did you ever notice how many imitators there were of Raymond Chandler's "hard-boiled" type of detective mystery? Hundreds of them, so many that the detective reader stopped reading! Even the plots were identical. Did you enjoy Howard Browne's "Warrior Of The Dawn"? It was a Tarzan-type story, and even the hero's name was similar (Tharn). But this is a world of imitation—every Ford car is like the Ford car preceding it, an exact imitation. You imitate your parents in every word you speak.

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Your accent is their accent. And you are being extremely unjust to accuse Shaver of plagiarism. As a matter of fact, there is not a shred of plagiarism in any of the stories we run, except when we find ourselves victimized by a sharper, which happens more often than publishers like! So we think you owe Mr. Shaver an apology. In our humble opinion, we believe Shaver has improved on the type of story that made Burroughs famous. Further, Shaver was the originator of every character, every new idea in his Shaver Mystery, and "Gods Of Venus" was no deviation from that original material. After all, nobody has a copyright on originality, nor on imitation. A direct copy-right, but not an imitation-right, and as long as there is a better way of doing things, and Burroughs knew a better way, he'll be imitated. Ask Howard Browne about that! He has imitated Tarzan, Chandler, and himself! Right now he's in Hollywood, making a fortune going right on imitating! Do you blame Shaver for capitalizing on a trend? But please, don't say "similarity" again! You are similar to all the human beings before you. And so are we. Darwin says we are all a bunch of monkeys, and you know how imitative they are! —Ed.

CONGRATULATE PHILLIPS

Sirs:

"Starship From Sirius" is one of the greatest science-fiction stories that I have ever read. Rog Phillips should be congratulated for both "Starship From Sirius" and "So Shall Ye Reap."

These two stories should be printed in book form, and sold to the public. I know that many of my friends and I would buy several copies.

Couldn't you print some Edgar Rice Burroughs stories? He is one of the greatest science-fiction writers there is.

I have read many science-fiction magazines, but none can compare with AMAZING STORIES.

Keep up the good work,

Lynn Tarbox,
2332 Selby Ave.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

We agree with you about those stories. And we think we'll have something even better for you from Rog Phillips in a very short time! Just stick with us and see for yourself. As for Burroughs, he isn't writing any more. He's very old, and not well. We certainly wish he was able to write, because we've still got a series of his we started before the war—and oh how we wish he had finished it. Darn Hitler anyway.—Ed.

NEW SPACESHIP SIGHTED?

Sirs:

Thought you and the SM Club might be interested in the enclosed clipping from last night's edition of today's Miami Daily News, for Sunday, 25 July. Seems to bear out, a little more publicly, what your excellent magazine, AS, has been handing out to a lot of unappreciative skeptics as

well as the rest of us imaginative folks in the past few years.

The Shaver affair started when I was over in France with Uncle Sam's nephews in the recent fracas, but I was lucky enough to have a Dad who managed to obtain and send me most all the mags I listed as my favorites, so I missed very few AMAZINGS or Fantastics, though I couldn't keep them, as I now do. Needless to say, I've been keenly interested in every article or story by Shaver and others on this so-called "Hoax," which I sincerely believe in, even though I am unable to follow up on the SM club for various reasons, including the cost of its own magazine.

I think your mags to be so good that I never criticize the stories or articles, as I believe an occasional lapse from near-perfection to be pardonable in your case. The rest of the Stafantasy field's mags, however, are, to me, seldom worth the trouble of writing criticism or praise, though I read 'em all. Yep, RAP, AS & FA are tops with this fella. Keep it up!

E. Alan Shlivek,
(a fan of 13
years' standing)
1735 NW 1 St.
Miami 35, Fla.

Yes, we've said it before, and we still say it—nobody can hand us that baloney about the flying disks and all those other things being weather balloons! What Mr. Shlivek refers to is the July 24 report of two Eastern Airline pilots who reported that they had met a tremendous wingless aircraft that shot a 40-foot flame out of its back end and traveled between 500 and 700 miles per hour. Captain Clarence S. Chiles and his co-pilot, John B. Whitted, told of seeing the fantastic aircraft and said it looked like a B-29 fuselage "blown up about four times." The aircraft was brilliantly lighted and had two decks of big square windows. It passed within several hundred feet of the pilots' DC-3 and then shot up into the clouds.

"We looked out the right side of the cockpit and saw a tremendous light. The first thing that came to my attention was the long stream of flame coming out of the rear end of the plane, or whatever it was," said Captain Chiles. "Then I noticed the two rows of square windows—it was a manmade thing, all right. We couldn't see any people aboard. It was traveling too fast for that. The aircraft seemed to be about four times the circumference of a B-29 fuselage, but it was only a little longer. There were no wings whatever.

The plane passed us on our right, then, as if the pilot had seen us and wanted to avoid us, it zoomed up into the same cloud it came out of. A forty-foot red flame shot out of its rear end. A luminous glow, like a giant fluorescent light, ran along the belly of the thing.

The Air Force suggested that the pilots may have seen an air radar balloon which has a square, tinfoil box fastened to it. The box reflects light and gives strange illusions as it twists and turns.

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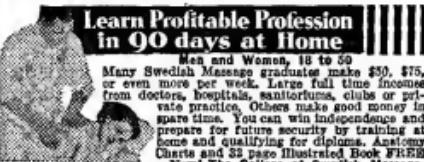
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The balloons are used for weather observations, and have no motive power of their own.

Captain Whitted said he had seen the Air Force's best jet planes not on the secret list, and estimated the speed of the space ship he saw as much faster than anything in his experience.

We readers of AMAZING STORIES know enough not to give even a second thought to the Air Force's explanation of the ship these two men saw, and that takes in a lot of people. It makes no sense whatever. If the army has a ship like this, we need never fear a foreign power again! But again, we science fiction enthusiasts know that we don't have such a ship. We have predicted the advance of science pretty accurately, as to pace and timing, and we know that ships such as these are many hundreds of years in the future for Earthmen. We can safely say that they are from another planet. Which one? What one could it be, other than—yes, you've guessed it! Science fiction's favorite . . . —Ed.

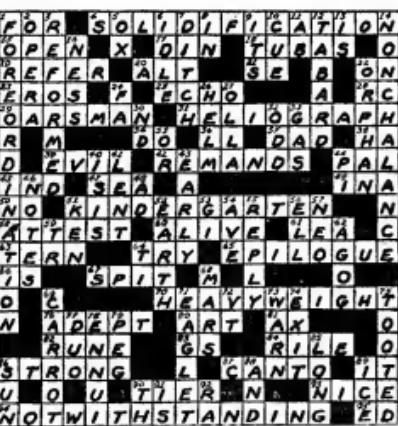
SHAVER'S BOOK

Sirs:

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Richard S. Shaver,
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